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Emily Lamb Normand

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THE EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION OF EMOTION WITHIN STEPSIBLING
RELATIONSHIPS: POLITENESS OF EXPRESSION AND STEPFAMILY
FUNCTIONING

by

Emily Lamb Normand

A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Professors Dawn O. Braithwaite and Jordan E. Soliz

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THE EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION OF EMOTION WITHIN STEPSIBLING
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FUNCTIONING

Emily Lamb Normand, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2010

Advisors: Dawn O. Braithwaite and Jordan E. Soliz

While scholars agree there are emotional challenges associated with the divorce and remarriage process, little is known about how stepsiblings interact and manage the experience and expression of emotion within their stepfamily. The current investigation examined the frequency of experience, intensity, and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion within stepsibling relationships over time. Using Politeness Theory as a framework, the study also investigated if an association existed between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of emotion and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. Participants were 187 stepsiblings who completed a self-report questionnaire consisting of both Likert-type items and open-ended questions. One-way repeated-measures ANOVAS were conducted with results indicating stepsiblings' experience and expression of emotion were a function of the stage of their relationship. In other words, stepsiblings experience and express more negative emotion and less positive emotion, during the early stages of the relationship. Upon completion of content analysis of the open-ended portion of the survey, results indicated stepsiblings did use politeness strategies during the expression of positive and negative emotion; however, using a

Welch's ANOVA and a two-way contingency table no association was found between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and their perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. The researcher was able to provide a stepsibling emotional profile that shows stepsiblings are experiencing and expressing emotion differently than in most interpersonal relationships. Although no association was found between politeness and stepsiblings' perception of their relationship and their perception of the stepfamily, the development of a politeness strategy coding framework provides a useful tool for understanding what kind of politeness strategies stepsiblings use during emotional expression to mitigate threats to face. Future researchers can use both the emotion profile and coding framework for continued exploration of the emotional complexities involved in a variety of stepfamily relationships.

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E. L. N.

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CHAPTER ONE

Rationale for the Study

As active participants in the social environment, it is inevitable that human beings will experience and express emotion. From an evolutionary perspective, the experience and expression of emotion function as adaptive social cues, facilitating both individual survival and group success and productivity (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Izard, 1993). Thus, humans experience and express the vast majority of their emotions within interpersonal interaction (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Metts & Planalp, 2002). Although voluntary personal relationships such as dating and friendship have drawn the most sustained and directed scholarly attention, interaction within nonvoluntary relationships, especially within the family system, produces an emotional climate not always evident in dyadic interactions (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). An emotion climate or emotion profile for any relationship consists of the specific emotions members of a relationship are likely to experience as well as the extent and manner in which they express the experienced emotions within the relationship (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). In the traditional family structure, multiple role positions (e.g., parent-spouse, child-sibling) and expectations of appropriate responses that change as children mature tend to create unique emotional challenges.

The impact of this structural complexity and the emotional profiles it evokes are even more salient in the communication patterns of stepfamilies. Stepfamily members face a number of emotional and communicative challenges while developing and maintaining relationships during and after the divorce and remarriage process (Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper, 1998; Braithwaite, Olson, Golish, Soukup, & Turman,

2001; Braithwaite, Schrod, & Baxter, 2006; Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999; Metts, Braithwaite, & Fine, 2009; Schrod, 2006). Understanding the antecedents, processes, and consequences of these challenges is becoming an increasingly important area of scholarly interest as the number of first marriage divorces is currently at 52-62%, 43% of all marriages are remarriages for at least one adult, and the number of second marriages involving children resulting in stepfamilies is currently at 65% (National Stepfamily Resource Center, 2010).

Stepfamily relationships embody the quintessential relationship in transition as members of new stepfamilies must deal with the challenges of redefining communication boundaries, managing conflict, adjusting to change, and negotiating new roles as they become a family (Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999; Braithwaite et al., 1998; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2006; Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Papernow, 1993; Visser & Visser, 1979). These communicative challenges are often accompanied by the experience and expression of intense emotion (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Metts et al., 2009; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). The study of stepfamily emotional communication during the early stages of stepfamily development is important as researchers have suggested that stepfamilies either “make or break” by the fourth year of development (Mills, 1984, Papernow, 1993, Visser & Visser, 1978; 1979).

Unfortunately, the communicative challenges associated with the divorce and remarriage process tend to be more difficult for the children to cognitively and emotionally process (Coleman et al., 2004) because adults may not realize the need or

take the time to explain the changing family form to their children. Throughout this process, stepchildren may feel an array of emotions that are difficult to understand and express, for example, hurt, envy, jealousy, anger, disappointment, and sadness (Coleman et al., 2004). Although some researchers have examined the relational effects of the communicative challenges between biological parents, stepparents, and their stepchildren (e.g., Afifi, 2003; Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant & Wagner, 2004; Baxter et al., 1999; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Schrod, 2006), there is some evidence that new stepsibling relationships may elicit powerful emotions within developing stepfamilies as well (Coleman & Ganong, 1993; Hetherington, et al., 1999).

Stepsiblings may find the experience and expression of emotion challenging as they may be confused about how to manage their emotions, particularly how to express strong negative emotions toward one another due to their lack of a shared family history, their common experience of loss, and the changes in their roles, positions, and functions within the stepfamily (Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). How stepsiblings communicatively manage the experience and expression of emotion in relation to their new stepfamily may affect the emotional climate of the entire stepfamily (Fitness & Duffield, 2004).

Therefore, stepsibling emotional communication is of central interest in the current study. Despite the importance of the stepsibling relationship to the successful reformulation of a stepfamily, researchers still know very little about the experience and expression of emotion between and among stepsiblings. Fitness and Duffield (2004) have argued that large gaps still remain in emotional communication research concerning emotional expression in most family relationships, let alone stepsibling relationships. In addition, the research that has been conducted on emotional communication in families has lacked

a theoretical framework. Fitness and Duffield (2004) argued that family emotional communication research needs to be guided by theory to help explain the dynamic and functional features of emotion as well as the causes and consequences of emotional expression within the family context. These concerns motivate the current investigation.

Purpose of the Current Study

Although there is still no overarching definition of emotion, the multicomponential explanations of emotion (summarized in Guerrero, Andersen, & Trost, 1998; Mesquita, 2001) have been useful for understanding emotion within an interpersonal context. Based on the multicomponential perspective, an emotion is an affective reaction (e.g., positive or negative) based on the appraisal of an antecedent object, event, and/or stimulus. Therefore, the experience of emotion within a family relationship can be characterized as either a positive or negative arousal stimulated by a family member's behavior (Fitness & Duffield, 2004; Metts & Planalp, 2002). For example, if a family member's actions meet or exceed an individual's expectations, then it is likely that behavior will elicit positive emotion. In contrast, if a family member violates an individual's expectations, negative emotion is likely elicited. In either case, the relational partner cognitively processes the emotional experience and then produces some type of behavioral response (i.e. emotional expression) (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Therefore, emotion can be considered relational currency, the exchange of which infuses the family relationship with purpose and meaning (Fitness & Duffield, 2004; Metts & Planalp, 2002).

The experience and subsequent expression of emotion between relational partners functions as interpersonal communication. Indeed, Andersen and Guerrero (1998) argued

that both our intentional and unintentional emotional displays can be considered communicative acts, which produce important relational consequences. One positive consequence of emotional communication is that it provides personal and relational information to relational partners. For example, discerning one's emotional experiences in relation to a significant other allows an individual to understand his or her own needs and goals, while expressing the experienced emotions allows an individual the opportunity to communicate his or her personal needs and desires to the relational partner (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Fitness & Duffield, 2004). Indeed, Leary (1996) argued that emotional expressions can be considered self-presentation tactics, used to present ourselves to others in certain ways. The communication of emotion may produce negative consequences for interpersonal interaction as well. Andersen and Guerrero (1998) argued that emotional displays within interpersonal interaction may actually threaten each relational partner's ability to maintain a competent self-presentation. In other words, although the expression of emotion within interpersonal interaction may serve as an avenue for self-presentation (Leary, 1996), the expression of emotion may simultaneously threaten each relational partner's desired face as well. According to Goffman (1959), face refers to the positive, public image of oneself that each person attempts to project or maintain during interaction with others. Goffman argued that face is emotionally invested and can be threatened, lost, maintained, or enhanced through social interaction

Brown and Levinson (1987) extended Goffman's definition of face through the development of Politeness Theory. According to these theorists, a person has two types of face (i.e., positive and negative face). Positive face refers to our desire to be liked and

included by the significant people in our lives, while negative face refers to our desire for autonomy and to be free from imposition or constraint. A face-threatening act (FTA) is any act that may infringe on a person's positive or negative face. The nature of the face-threatening act (i.e., whether it is more or less threatening), however, is determined by three features of the social context: the power of the speaker over the hearer, the social distance between speaker and hearer, and the rank of the face-threatening act (culturally shared ideas about the degree to which particular acts are seen as costly, obligated, enjoyable, etc.) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000). Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that the strong expression of emotion between relational partners may represent an FTA that intrinsically threatens both positive and negative face. The theorists also maintained that relational partners may employ at least five types of politeness strategies while communicating an FTA that may help minimize or alleviate the threat to face. The use of politeness strategies during an FTA may also affect relational partners' perception of the quality of their relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Trees & Manusov, 1998).

The nature of the stepsibling relationship has the potential to elicit powerful emotional expressions between and among stepsiblings and exploring the emotional communication between stepsiblings during the formation of a new stepfamily will contribute to our understanding of how face is threatened through emotional expression. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was two-fold. My first goal was to provide an emotion profile or profiles that characterize stepsibling relationships. In order to meet this goal for the stepsibling relationship, I examined the specific emotions that stepsiblings reported they experienced, the extent to which they expressed those emotions, the manner

in which they expressed those emotions toward one another when they first begin living together in the same household, and how that experience and expression may have changed over time. My second goal was to explore how, if at all, the expression of emotion between stepsiblings affected stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and of the relationships they have within the larger stepfamily system. Politeness Theory was a useful theory to frame the current study because the expression of emotion between stepsiblings may be considered a potentially face-threatening act and the use of politeness strategies during stepsiblings' emotional expressions may mitigate the threat to face as well as affect stepsiblings' perception of the quality their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily.

I argue for the development of an emotion profile or profiles for stepsiblings as well as an understanding of a profile's effect on stepsiblings' perceptions of their relationship and the entire stepfamily by outlining the components of interpersonal emotion profiles and their effect on interpersonal relationships. Therefore, in the remaining sections of this chapter, I: (a) discuss the process, valence, and importance of emotional experience and expression within interpersonal relationships, (b) illustrate the propensity for emotional experience and emotional expression within the stepsibling relationship, and (c) present a theoretical rationale to help frame an understanding of the function and purpose of emotional communication within stepsibling relationships.

The Experience and Expression of Emotion within Stepsibling Relationships

The research produced by emotion scholars on the process of emotional experience and emotional expression and the importance of appropriate expression within interpersonal relationships may help inform research on emotional communication within

stepsibling relationships. The divorce and remarriage process presents a number of complex interpersonal and communicative challenges that elicit powerful emotions for stepsiblings who are attempting to create, manage, and negotiate new relationships with one another. As such, stepsibling relationships represent a unique interpersonal relationship for the study of emotional expression in that stepsibling communication falls somewhere between a new developing interpersonal relationship and an established familial relationship. It is unclear what type of emotional experiences (i.e., positive and/or negative) occur within this context and what type of emotional expressions (i.e., positive and/or negative) are considered acceptable. Therefore, in order to understand emotion profiles of stepsiblings and how the experience and expression of emotion operates within stepsibling relationships, I first describe what is known about the components of an interpersonal emotion profile and the process of emotional experience and expression within interpersonal relationships, broadly defined.

Defining Emotional Experience and Expression in Interpersonal Relationships

Human beings often experience and express emotion more intensely and more frequently within their interpersonal relationships than they do in private or within their non-interpersonal relationships (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Metts & Planalp, 2002). In order to understand how emotion is experienced and expressed in an interpersonal context, it is important to distinguish emotional experience, which may or may not be overtly displayed to a relational partner, from emotional expression, which is the communication of emotional information.

An emotional experience is the affective reaction (i.e., positive or negative) one experiences in the appraisal of an object, antecedent, or stimulus in one's environment,

including reactions to the behavior of others (Guerrero et al., 1998; Mesquita, 2001). In an attempt to understand the experience of emotion developed during socialization (i.e., within interpersonal relationships) many researchers espouse a multicomponential approach to emotion (Frijda, 2005; Mesquita, 2001). Building from the tenets of Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991; 2006; Roseman & Smith, 2001), these researchers argued that an emotional experience may differ across individuals and situations and the experience itself is comprised of several different levels and components. First, there is the antecedent event, which is some stimulus within an individual's environment that activates an area in the brain called the amygdale. This area in the brain then evaluates the antecedent event through the first level of emotional experience, called primary appraisal. Primary appraisal allows the individual to assess both the significance and valence (i.e., positive or negative) of the event. The amygdale also sends signals to the body to activate its initial behavioral response to the event. This arousal is called action readiness. Action readiness generally manifests as a physiological change of some kind (e.g., a rise in heartbeat, stomach tension, or even activated muscles in the face).

According to Appraisal Theory, the second level of emotional experience is secondary appraisal. During secondary appraisal, the individual continues to cognitively process the significance behind the event that caused the arousal as well as how to cope with it. It is at this point, that an individual tries to make sense out of what they are feeling and also how to label it as a particular emotion.

The final level of Appraisal Theory is reappraisal, during which an individual will reassess the conclusions they made processing the significance of the arousal and the options for coping with it while in secondary appraisal. Reappraisal may occur shortly

after the initial experience of emotion or after much time has passed; however, in both cases it allows the individual the opportunity to confirm their original assessment of the emotional experience or to evaluate the emotional experience in a new way. In most instances, an individual's emotional experience process is followed by the expression of the emotion (Guerrero et al., 1998; Mesquita, 2001).

Emotional expression refers to the outward display of positive and negative affective states, both verbally in linguistic expression and nonverbally in tone of voice, facial expression, and body positioning (Kring, Smith, & Neale, 1994). Verbal expression refers to statements describing affective states (e.g., I am feeling really sad right now; What you did made me angry). Nonverbal expression of emotion refers to the degree to which people's emotional reactions can be read on their face or through their body movement, whether they intended to express it or not (DePaulo, Blank, Swaim, & Harfield, 1992). Although the verbal and nonverbal distinction is useful in theory, in actual practice nonverbal cues are probably more informative, especially within stepfamily relationships. For example, if a child says to a biological parent when referring to his stepsister, "you're nicer to Mary than you are to me" no specific emotion has been specifically verbally expressed. However, this statement can serve as a trigger for an astute parent to infer an emotion from the vocal tone and positioning that accompanies it (i.e., anger or sadness, jealousy or envy).

Intentionality is another important factor in the study of interpersonal emotional expression, especially when some scholars use emotional expression synonymously with emotional communication. Guerrero et al. (1998) argued that emotional expression within

in an interpersonal context may or may not be intentionally expressed. In fact, the researchers argued that emotional expression can be classified in at least three ways.

First, there is such a thing as spontaneous emotional expression such as the frown that slips across the face when someone is displeased, the smile that forms automatically at the sight of a loved one, or the scream of fear if startled by the movement of a snake. An emotional expression of this kind is often unintentional or at least does not require an excessive amount of active processing. Second, humans may use strategic emotional communication (e.g., expressing disappointment with your partner, prompting him or her to finally complete a task you wanted done). The strategic expression of emotion is generally intended in order to meet personal or interactional goals; however, the emotion may be expressed to meet one particular personal goal and in the process may inadvertently meet other interactional goals as well (Metts & Planalp, 2002). For example, Metts and Planalp (2002) argued “an individual might express strong negative emotions primarily to vent or dispel intensity, but if another person is present, the expression might also serve to gain the individual social support, increase understanding, or bring about change” (p. 349). Therefore, emotional expression between relational partners may affect social goals and relational quality whether it was intentionally or unintentionally expressed. Finally, individuals may or may not express emotion based on display rules, those rules that stem from family, occupational, and social/cultural mandates for appropriate emotional expression (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992). According to Ekman and Friesen (1975), display rules tell individuals when to intensify or deintensify the expression of the emotions they are feeling, when to express (simulate) an emotion not felt, when to inhibit expression of an emotion that is

felt, and when to mask emotion display, that is, repress an emotion that is felt while simultaneously expressing an emotion that is not felt.

The decision to adhere to particular display rules is based, in part, on situational or relational factors. For example, Aune, Aune, and Buller (1994) argued that the type of display rules used by relational partners to manage their emotional expression may depend on a relationship's stage of development as well as the valence of the experienced emotion. This final classification of interpersonal emotional expression may be particularly helpful in distinguishing stepsibling emotional communication from general interpersonal emotional communication. According to Aune et al. (1994), early stages of interpersonal relational development are often characterized by the general inhibition of emotional expression; however, if emotion is expressed, the expression of positive emotion is often desired and considered more acceptable than the expression of negative emotion. Hayes and Metts (2008) found similar results in terms of valence of emotion. When reporting about emotional expression within different interpersonal relationships, respondents in their study expressed positive emotion, but tended to try and mask or minimize negative emotional expressions. Although this same pattern may be true for developing stepsibling relationships, the challenges of coming together as a new family may elicit powerful expressions of negative emotion during the early stages of relational development (Lamb, 2004b). Therefore, in order to formulate stepsibling emotion profiles and to understand the process of emotional experience and emotional expression within stepsibling relationships, it is also important to understand how people in interpersonal relationships categorize different emotions based on type and valence.

Type and Valence of Emotion within Interpersonal Relationships

Emotions are generally considered to be either primary or secondary (Fabes & Martin, 1991; Fitness, 1996). Fitness (1996) argued from an evolutionary perspective that there are several basic emotions that serve an essential function in the survival needs of early humans and continue to be experienced at some level in all humans. These include, but are perhaps not limited to, joy, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. Although these basic emotions are “hard-wired” and processed in identified locations of the brain, their experience and expression are also culturally malleable because they respond to stimuli in the social environment as well as the physical environment. Fitness’s notion of “culturally malleable” is important in that through cultural and social interaction these basic emotions are blended into what would be referred to as secondary or social emotions. Secondary emotions are considered complex blends of basic emotions which are culturally and socially learned including, but perhaps not limited to: shame, guilt, embarrassment, disappointment, jealousy, envy, forgiveness, and pride (Fabes & Martin, 1991). In order to understand how the experience and expression of emotion operates within a specific relational context like stepsiblings, I must be concerned with the type of emotions that are generated from and are influenced by social sources (Leary, 1996). Therefore, the emotions of interest in the current study are basic and secondary emotions experienced and expressed during interaction with others, often referred to as social emotions (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998).

Traditionally, emotions are categorized as either positive or negative; however, there are more specific categories for emotions based on the functions they serve, the goal to which intentional expression might be directed, and/or the relationship quality they reflect. Due to the potential complexity of stepsibling relationships, further

categorizing emotion based on the aforementioned terms is important in understanding the purpose and function of emotion within them. Therefore, Guerrero and Andersen (2000) argued that emotion can be placed in one of four categories depending on the role of that emotion in relationships. Affectionate emotions help individuals in interpersonal relationships form connections or attachments with others; they include positive emotions such as happiness/joy, love, like, passion, and warmth. Self-conscious emotions reflect an individual's evaluation of self in relation to others; they include a mix of positive and negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, guilt, and pride. Melancholic emotions are those experienced and expressed based on some kind of relational loss, such as a break-up or death of a loved one to name a few. These include negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and loneliness. Finally, hostile emotions are those negative emotions we experience and express when we are in conflict with a relational partner such as anger, disgust, hate, jealousy, and envy. Guerrero and Andersen's (2000) social emotion categories have demonstrated that the experience and expression of positive and negative emotions serve different purposes within social interaction. These emotion categories may be useful in understanding the process and effect of emotional experience and expression within stepsibling relationships.

Scholars have argued that it is useful to further distinguish between certain negative emotions because the personal and relational consequences of expressing negative emotion differ depending on the type (Metts & Planalp, 2002; Metts et al., 2009). Thus, certain negative emotions or what scholars call weak negative emotions may be quite painful for the individual experiencing them, but expressing the emotion to a relational partner may not have negative consequences for the relationship (Metts &

Planalp, 2002). For example, experiencing an intense melancholic negative emotion such as sadness may be incredibly painful for an individual; however, if he or she expresses sadness to a relational partner, the consequence may be a positive bonding experience for the couple. In contrast, the experience of an intense hostile negative emotion such as rage may be painful for the individual and the expression of rage toward a relational partner may produce further conflict or relational strife for the couple. Therefore, negative emotions producing negative relational consequences are categorized as strong negative emotions. This same pattern for relational consequences may be true for stepsibling relationships; therefore, it will be useful to refer to two different categories of negative emotions: strong negative (e.g., anger, rage, hate, resentment, envy, frustration, jealousy, annoyance, and disgust) and weak negative (e.g., sadness, loneliness, fear, disappointment, guilt, embarrassment, and shame). To be clear, positive emotions most often include: happiness, admiration, pride, like, love, and gratitude (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Planalp, 1999; Metts & Planalp, 2002). Again, the valence of emotion is significant because the experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion can be face-threatening, having implications on the quality of an interpersonal relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Metts et al., 2009). Therefore, in the current study, I distinguish between positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions based on the various relational consequences involved in the expression of each type of emotion.

Before I provide the basis for understanding the importance of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions within stepsibling relationships, I first explore the

importance of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotional expression within interpersonal relationships, broadly defined.

The Importance of Expressing Emotion in Interpersonal Relationships

Interpersonal relationships are distinguished from other relationship types, such as temporary, social, or acquaintance relationships by the fact that relational partners share personal knowledge of each other and are mutually interdependent (Metts & Planalp, 2002). These features frame the experience and expression of emotion in unique ways. That is, we certainly may be angry with another driver who cuts us out of a lane, but the arousal passes quickly with no relational consequence. In addition, we might think it rude for a neighbor to walk past us without a greeting, but we are not likely to ruminate about the event for very long. By contrast, in relationships where presumably the other person has our best interest at heart, and knows what pleases, angers, frightens, and hurts us, we notice, process, and respond to deviations that arouse us. In short, we are more likely to experience an array of emotions that are far more complex and enduring in close relationships compared to casual relations. Perhaps more important, we face the dilemma of whether and how to express these emotions.

In the current study, emotional expression is further complicated within stepsibling relationships because new stepfamily members may possess those characteristics typical of a close, family relationship and characteristics typical of new acquaintances. In most interdependent relationships, however, emotional expression (intentional or unintentional) serves personal and/or relational purposes (Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996; Metts & Planalp, 2002). Indeed, emotional expression can be considered a self-presentational tactic which communicates personal and relational information

between relational partners (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Leary, 1996). For example, positive emotions such as happiness and joy are generally expressed within interpersonal relationships to communicate pleasure or contentment with one's relational partner (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). Love is often expressed with the goal of strengthening the intimate bond between partners (Taraban, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). Pride may be expressed to a relational partner to communicate one's need for recognition and approval (Leary & Meadows, 1991).

Strong negative emotions such as anger and jealousy may be expressed within interpersonal relationships as relational partners attempt to gain relational control or to maintain and negotiate their role in the relationship (Canary, Spitzberg, & Semic, 1998; Fehr, Baldwin, Collins, Patterson, & Benditt, 1999; Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Salovey & Rodin, 1989). Weak negative emotions such as sadness and loneliness are typically expressed within interpersonal relationships as a way to solicit social support from one's relational partner (Segrin, 1998; Zisowitz-Barr, 2000). Other negative emotions such as guilt, shame, and embarrassment are expressed within interpersonal relationships to communicate a need to repair an unpleasant situation between relational partners or to deflect criticism from a relational partner (Bradford & Petronio, 1998; O'Keefe, 2000; Sabini, Garvey, & Hall, 2001). Within a family context, Fitness and Duffield (2004) argued that the open exchange of both positive and negative emotional communication between and among family members helps to create an emotional climate which affects every day family functioning. The importance of emotional expression, therefore, becomes increasingly significant for new stepfamily members who are still trying to develop a productive emotional climate.

In addition to providing invaluable personal and relational information, appropriately expressing positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions during interpersonal interaction may affect individual and relational well-being (Mongrain & Vettese, 2003). This is especially true when the individual or relational partners are dealing with change from challenging or traumatic experiences such as, divorce and/or remarriage (Pennebaker, 1997; Planalp, 1999; Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999). Planalp (1999) argued that translating emotional experiences into expression helps to create and sustain personal and relational identities by allowing individuals to cope with their life experiences in at least four ways. First, expressing emotions after a particularly traumatic event helps individuals distance themselves from the experience. Putting space between the self and the traumatic experience allows individuals to manage any overwhelming emotions they may be feeling. Second, expressing emotion helps individuals make meaning of the experience, putting it into a constructed whole. This means that individuals can fully understand the experience and the emotions they felt, instead of just bits and pieces of the problem. Third, expressing emotion allows individuals to unify their thoughts and feelings about the event or experience. At this point, affect and cognition work together to help individuals manage the emotional experience. Finally, expressing emotion allows individuals to have a sense of control over a situation in which they may otherwise feel powerless. Putting complex emotional experiences into coherent linguistic messages allows individuals to become the actor in the situation rather than the victim.

In addition, researchers have documented that individual mental and physical well-being improves when individuals express emotional experiences through writing or

talking (Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999). Writing or talking about an emotional experience helps individuals re-conceptualize the traumatic experience and/or relationship within which it occurred. To understand the importance of emotional expression after traumatic experiences, Smyth and Pennebaker (1999) analyzed the use of emotion words by individuals who wrote about traumatic experiences in four different studies (i.e., college students writing about individual traumas, first-year college students writing about their deepest thoughts and feelings about coming to school, prisoners writing about being incarcerated, and professionals writing about getting laid off). In all four cases, the researchers found that individuals who used positive emotion words while writing about traumatic or difficult experiences continually improved their health. Individuals who used moderate negative emotion words improved their well-being more than individuals who used a high amount or a low amount of negative emotion words. Therefore, the written expression of emotions elicited from a traumatic experience allows individuals the opportunity to be completely honest about how a traumatic situation is affecting them (Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth & Pennebaker, 1999). Writing down one's emotional experience is considered safe practice because no one will necessarily be able to judge or criticize one's feelings (Pennebaker, 1997). However, according to Pennebaker (1997), writing can be a slow and painful process, while expressing our emotional experiences in the presence of others may offer more immediate relief. Talking about our emotional experiences, especially those elicited from trauma, can be just as beneficial as writing about them to our individual and relational well-being. Thus, for stepsiblings dealing with the sometimes traumatic and challenging experience of a new stepfamily, the ability to appropriately express emotion, either through writing to or

talking with stepfamily members, may be critical to developing adaptive stepfamily functioning.

Although emotional communication often has positive consequences (i.e., meeting personal and interactional goals and improving individual and relational well-being), researchers have warned that there can be negative consequences involved in emotional expression (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Pennebaker, 1997; Planalp, 1999). Thus, understanding how to appropriately express emotion becomes important for the quality of interpersonal relationships. The expression of emotion can be considered a self-presentational strategy which shows a relational partner how one is feeling and what he or she should do about it (Clark et al., 1996; Mongrain & Vette, 2003). However, the expression of emotion can also compromise one's desired self-presentation (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998) as well as threaten his or her partner's self-image or face (Goffman, 1959). Indeed, Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that while the expression of emotion between relational partners can enhance or validate a partner's face, it can easily constitute a threat to both self and partner's face as well. Planalp (1999) argued that when expressing emotions "with any confidant there is the risk of being judged negatively, of having private information revealed to others, of having your interpretation of your feelings shaped by their views, of upsetting the other person, and of damaging the relationship" (p. 118). Based on the face-threatening nature of emotional communication, relational partners must learn to effectively manage their emotional experiences and expressions. New stepsiblings may be wise to remain sensitive to this during the early stages of their relationships so they do not immediately threaten face before the relationship has even developed.

Researchers have shown that emotional expression is often dictated by social guidelines regarding the valence of the emotion and the developmental stage of the relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999). During early stages of relational development, emotional communication is influenced by cultural display rules, which often dictate that the expression of positive emotion is more socially acceptable than the expression of negative emotion (Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002). Within this context, the expression of positive emotion is said to increase social likeability, while the expression of negative emotion is often considered a sign of personal weakness (Planalp, 1999). As such, individuals often try to communicate emotion with a conscious concern for one another's face, freely expressing positive emotion, but controlling negative emotional expressions. Metts and Planalp (2002) argued that new relational partners often express emotion based on the "broader social norm of politeness" (p.349). This would suggest that individuals follow Ekman and Friesen's display rules, intensifying or simulating positive emotions, inhibiting or deintensifying negative emotions and masking felt negative emotions by expressing positive emotions not felt. Such practices are employed, no doubt, to save both one's own and relational partner's face.

As an interpersonal relationship further develops, however, initial rules of emotional expression may no longer apply (Aune et al., 1994; Planalp, 1999). Mature friendships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships can tolerate the expression of both positive and negative emotion. In fact, the expression of negative emotion is often expected in this context (Planalp, 1999). Emotional communication can still be a face-threatening act at this relational level, however, if relational partners do not strategically

and effectively manage their emotional expression. Planalp (1999) argued excessive expression of both positive and negative emotion by an individual can be incredibly oppressive to his or her relational partner. Therefore, despite the stage of relationship development, relational partners must learn that their emotional communication is potentially face threatening and; therefore, the expression of emotion must be enacted carefully to ensure that threats to face are considered. It is difficult to understand where a new stepsibling relationship may fall on this relational development timeline for emotional expression. While stepsiblings must be aware of the face-threatening nature of emotional expression and how it affects stepfamily functioning, the unique emotional and relational circumstances surrounding the developing stepsibling relationship make it difficult to know when it is appropriate to express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions. Therefore, in the next section of this chapter, I describe the characteristics of the stepsibling relationship in order to demonstrate the need to examine how emotional communication may affect the stepsibling relationship and the entire stepfamily.

The Challenges of the Stepsibling Relationship

The Communicative Challenges of Stepchildren

Stepchildren face a number of complex, communicative challenges as they go through the divorce and remarriage process (Braithwaite et al., 1998; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2006). Specifically, stepchildren must define and redefine communication boundaries, adjust to geographical and financial changes, deal with loyalty conflict, and negotiate new roles. Stepchildren find they must cope with and begin living with new family members often in a short period of time (Coleman et al., 2004;

Ganong & Coleman, 1994; 2004). This realignment of new stepfamily relationships fosters financial, residential, and interpersonal problems for stepchildren (Coleman et al., 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; 2004; Hetherington et al., 1999; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). For example, stepchildren are often forced to deal with role ambiguity, new communicative boundaries, and loyalty conflict (Burrell, 1995; Speer & Trees, 2007). As a result, stepchildren often feel caught in the middle between their residential parent, stepparent, and nonresidential parent, they often feel less close to their stepfamily, they often do not feel a sense of belonging within their stepfamily and they often feel less satisfied with their family compared to children from non-divorced families. (Afifi, 2003; Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Baxter et al., 2004; Leake, 2007). The challenges of stepchildren are of particular interest in the current study because so many of the challenges have the potential to elicit powerful emotional experiences and influence the form, function, and consequences of emotional expression (Golish, 2003).

The Emotional Effects of the Divorce and Remarriage Process on Stepchildren

The challenges of divorce and remarriage are difficult for stepchildren to emotionally process (Coleman et al., 2004; Metts et al., 2009). Depending upon the effectiveness of parents' communication with their children over the dissolution of the original marriage, stepchildren may be confused during the divorce and remarriage process becoming more negative, less warm, and less communicative with biological family members and new stepfamily members (Coleman et al., 2004; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1979; Hetherington et al., 1999). Children of divorced and remarried families may also suffer from academic, social, behavioral, and emotional problems (Freisthler, Svare, & Harrison-Jay; 2003; Hetherington et al., 1979; Hetherington et al., 1999). For

example, many children of divorce go through unsettling and dramatic household changes in routine and management, which often produces feelings of anger, jealousy, stress, and anxiety (Coleman et al., 2004; Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). Baxter et al. (2004) argued that stepchildren often experience an emotional contradiction in their relationship with stepfamily members. The researchers asked stepchildren to reflect on the communication within their relationships with their stepparents. In reference to the communication of emotion, the stepchildren reported that there was an emotional distance between themselves and their stepparent; however, they expressed a desire to be emotionally close with their stepparents.

The Experience and Expression of Emotion within Stepsibling Relationships

Despite the increasing number of researchers studying the interpersonal and communicative challenges between stepchildren, their parents, and their stepparents, researchers have paid little attention to how stepfamily members manage the particular challenges associated with the communication of emotion (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Specifically, it is important to understand the emotional communication between and among stepsiblings because researchers have argued that the presence of stepsibling relationships creates more complex family dynamics within a developing stepfamily (Coleman & Ganong, 1993; Ganong & Coleman, 2004). In fact, the stepsibling relationship is one of the most conflict-ridden relationships in remarriage families due to competition over resources, parental attention and affection, and space (Lamb, 2004a; Walsh, 1992). In order to understand the nature of emotional expression between or among stepsiblings, it is important to first examine the type and valence of the emotions that are likely to be elicited within stepsibling relationships.

Rosenberg and Hajal (1985) identified eight characteristics that help explain the presence of emotion within the stepsibling relationship. First, stepsibling relationships are often formed quickly. New stepsiblings may be introduced into the stepfamily home before stepsiblings have a chance to get to know one another, causing feelings of anxiety. Second, stepsibling relationships have fluid boundaries. Custody arrangements mean that stepsiblings “live together inconsistently on a short-term or long-term basis,” leaving stepchildren feeling confused (p. 289). Third, stepsiblings lack a shared family history. When rules and routines from their original family do not work in their new stepfamily, stepsiblings may experience feelings of anger and distress. Fourth, stepsiblings share a common experience of loss through divorce. Stepsiblings may end up blaming each other for the loss of their original family and their new potentially uncomfortable stepfamily situation. Fifth, stepsiblings may be in constant conflict over their loyalty to their biological siblings, their residential parent, their nonresidential parent, and their new stepfamily. Sixth, stepsiblings also face changes in position, role, and function when they enter a new family. These new roles or positions in the new stepfamily can foster feelings of jealousy and anger over loss of parental attention and privileges their old position afforded them. Seventh, stepsiblings’ individual life cycle may be incongruent with the family life cycle. Rosenberg and Hajal (1985) argued that it may be difficult to foster positive stepsibling relationships if stepchildren are getting ready to leave the home around the time of remarriage. Finally, stepsiblings must deal with an increase in family size, which means that they must share “economic resources and existing space” (p. 290). Stepsiblings often feel their sacrifices are unfair and jealousy increases. Lamb (2004b) found that stepsiblings experienced a variety of negative emotions such as jealousy and

anger when they were forced to share intimate informational and physical space with one another.

Despite all of the negative emotions that stepsiblings may experience in their new stepfamily, Rosenberg and Hajal (1985) argued that some stepsiblings may experience positive emotions such as happiness and hope when considering the addition of new stepsiblings. For some stepchildren, the addition of a new stepsibling could mean that they will have a new playmate or that they will have someone to talk to about their new situation. Presently, researchers have very little empirical knowledge about the specific emotions that stepsiblings experience and express when new stepsiblings are introduced into the family because little to no research has been conducted on this relationship (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). Therefore, in the current study my first goal was to develop an emotion profile or profiles for stepsibling relationships, which would help me explore how stepsiblings experience and express emotions toward one another when they first begin living together in the same household and how that experience and expression may change over time. The challenges associated with the formation of stepsibling relationships have the potential to elicit an array of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions between stepsiblings; however, the type and valence of emotion experienced and expressed during the early stages of relational development may change as the relationship progresses. Thus, I posed the following research question.

RQ1. What specific emotions represent the experience of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion within stepsibling relationships?

In addition, emotion profiles for any relationship must outline the specific emotions members of a relationship are likely to experience and express. This includes

not only the type of experienced emotion, but also the extent and manner in which they experienced the emotions (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). Therefore, in order to develop comprehensive stepsibling emotion profiles, it is important to identify how often stepsiblings experience positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions and how intense the experience of each emotion may be not only for the early stages of relational development but also as the relationship develops. Baxter et al. (1999) argued that emotional adjustment within a stepfamily can take years for some stepfamily members. Thus, I posed the following two research questions.

RQ2. How often do stepsiblings experience positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often do they experience those emotions currently and do those experiences differ over time?¹

RQ3. How intense are stepsiblings' experiences of positive, strong negative and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how intense are those emotional experiences currently and does the intensity of those experiences differ over time?¹

Finally, Guerrero et al. (1998) argued an experienced emotion may be overtly expressed and appropriately expressing experienced emotion may have important implications for individual and relational well-being (Planalp, 1999; Pennebaker, 1997). This is especially true for stepsibling relationships as the expression of emotion between members may affect overall stepfamily functioning (Fitness & Duffield, 2004; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). Thus, accurate emotion profiles will also outline how experienced

emotions are expressed within relationships. As such, I posed the following research question.

RQ4. How often do stepsiblings express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationship with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often do they express those emotions currently and do those expressions differ over time?¹

The stepsibling relationship represents an emotionally laden relationship due to the many challenges stepsiblings in developing relationships tend to face. The experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions between stepsiblings has the potential to further complicate the relationship if the emotional communication involved in the stepsibling relationship is not handled appropriately (Papernow, 1993; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). Indeed, stepsiblings' experience of emotion and choice of emotional expression have the potential to significantly threaten each stepsibling's face and, in turn, it may affect the well-being and functioning of the stepsibling relationship as well as the entire stepfamily (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). Thus, my second goal in the current study was to explore the relationship between the expression of emotion and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that strong emotional expressions between relational partners represent potentially face-threatening acts, suggesting that Politeness Theory would be an appropriate theoretical framework for the examination of emotional communication's affect on an interpersonal relationship. Therefore, in the next section of this chapter, I argue that Politeness Theory is a useful theoretical rationale to guide the study of stepsibling emotional communication.

Theoretical Rationale

Politeness Theory

Politeness Theory is a useful theory to frame the current study because it addresses the analysis of specific messages between people (e.g., emotional expressions) and how a message enhances or threatens each relational partner's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory extended Goffman's (1959) concept of face, which refers to the positive, self-image that each person attempts to maintain during interaction with others. According to Goffman, all competent members of society have and know each other to have face, which can be lost, maintained, or enhanced through social interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that Politeness Theory could help account for exactly how the loss, maintenance, or enhancement of face is achieved during interaction. Although this theory has not been used to study stepsiblings specifically, it has been used to identify face-threatening messages at work in other interpersonal relationships including dating, friendships, and traditional family relationships (Goldsmith, 2008). Goldsmith (2008) even argued that future research using Politeness Theory should examine face and face work within particular social and cultural contexts. Therefore, in order to understand how Politeness Theory may be applied to stepsibling relationships, I address the main tenets of this theory as well as the contributions this theory has made to interpersonal research in the next two sections of this theoretical rationale.

Tenets of Politeness Theory

All human beings have what is known as positive and negative face needs or wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive face refers to one's desire to be liked and

included by the significant people in his or her life. Negative face refers to one's desire for autonomy and to be free from imposition or constraint (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Although it is the social goal of most people to maintain or honor one another's face (Goldsmith, 2008), it is inevitable that our positive and negative face will be threatened by others in social interaction (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Metts & Cupach, 2008). In the current study, I wanted to understand how potentially face threatening the expression of emotion may be between and among stepsiblings.

Positive face is threatened through messages communicating that a person is not valued and that the speaker does not care about the hearer's feelings or wants (e.g., expressions of disapproval or criticism and complaints or insults) (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Metts, 2005). In fact, Brown and Levinson argued that positive face is sometimes threatened through various types of emotional expressions. Expressions of strong negative and even weak negative emotions may communicate that the speaker does not care or is indifferent to the hearer's positive face, giving the hearer reason to fear or be embarrassed by the speaker. The expression of positive emotions such as pride or even happiness also has the potential to threaten a hearer's positive face as it may indicate that the speaker does not care about the hearer's feelings.

Negative face is threatened through messages communicating that the speaker means to interfere with a hearer's autonomy (e.g., orders, demands, and requests) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Negative face is also threatened by certain types of emotional expression. For example, expressions of envy or admiration may threaten negative face because it communicates the speaker wants something the hearer has, prompting the hearer to protect his or her goods. In addition, expressions of strong negative emotions,

such as hatred and anger may also communicate a speaker's desire for the hearer's goods or services. Therefore, a face-threatening act (FTA) is any act that may infringe on a person's positive or negative face and under many circumstances an emotional expression can be considered an FTA. To be clear, not every emotional expression between relational partners will constitute an FTA. In fact, emotional expressions can be validating to positive and negative face under the right circumstance. Goldsmith (2008) argued that linguistic features of politeness and face help to define relationships and identities even when no face threat exists, but attending to those acts which are face threatening will help us understand how to deal with those challenging relational situations. Therefore, in the current study, I wanted to understand which type of face is threatened by particular emotional expressions within the stepsibling relationship.

Strong expressions of emotion along with other particular FTAs have the potential to simultaneously "threaten both positive and negative face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 67). For example, an expression of anger can directly threaten positive face because it communicates that a speaker dislikes "something" about the hearer's behavior; however, the same expression of anger can also threaten negative face because it communicates that the speaker could harm the hearer for doing that "something" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions and other FTAs can also threaten one type of face while simultaneously stroking the other type of face (Metts, 2005). For example, a speaker may express gratitude toward a hearer, which may stroke the hearer's positive face; however, the same expression may impede on his or her negative face because the hearer feels obligated to express gratitude in return. FTAs, such as emotional expressions, may also stroke the hearer's face while simultaneously threatening the speaker's face and vice

versa. When a speaker expresses sadness at a hearer's misfortune through tears, the hearer's positive face is enhanced, while the speaker's positive face may be threatened because he or she is publicly emotional (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In sum, excessive and unmitigated expression of both positive and negative emotions within interpersonal relationships can be incredibly face threatening for both relational partners (Planalp, 1999). In order to manage the potential loss of face from emotional expression, partners employ at least five communicative devices known as politeness strategies, four of which are useful for mitigating the loss of face when a speaker makes an FTA. First, a speaker may use bald on-record messages, which indicates that a speaker does the FTA without showing any effort in reducing the inherent face threat toward a hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Performing an FTA baldly, without redressive action, is usually done in the interest of being clear, concise, and unambiguous for the intended hearer because the speaker does not fear that loss of face will be an issue (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

A second strategy is doing the FTA with redressive action, such as positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness strategies minimize the threat of the FTA by stroking the hearer's positive face (i.e., communicating that the hearer is valued and appreciated even as the speaker performs an FTA). There are essentially three types of positive politeness strategies a speaker can enact (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Metts, 2005). As one type of politeness strategy a speaker may claim to share common ground with the hearer. For example, a speaker may try to communicate that he or she shares in-group membership, point of view, attitude, opinions, knowledge, and empathy with the hearer. Metts (2005) argued that a speaker can accomplish this by using in-group

markers, avoiding disagreement, and joking with the hearer. Another type of positive politeness strategy a speaker can enact is to show interest in the hearer's needs and wants. The speaker indicates that the hearer is important by including him or her in an activity. The third type of positive politeness strategy for a speaker is to actually fulfill the hearer's particular want or need. For example, a speaker could give the hearer a gift he or she may have wanted.

The third main politeness strategy is performing the FTA with negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Negative politeness strategies are messages supporting a hearer's negative face by communicating that the speaker respects the hearer's autonomy. There are essentially two types of negative politeness strategies a speaker can utilize. One type of negative politeness strategy a speaker can enact is to make sure he or she does not assume that a hearer can or wants to fulfill a request or other type of FTA. In this case, a speaker should ask questions or remain indirect while performing a FTA. The second negative politeness strategy is to make sure that the speaker does not force the hearer to act. A speaker performing negative politeness in this context uses self-effacement and formality to provide the hearer with options (Cupach & Metts, 1994). For example, a speaker may acknowledge how busy a hearer is before requesting additional time from the hearer or the speaker may apologize for asking or requesting the hearer to act in the first place. A speaker then allows the hearer the option not to act.

The fourth main politeness strategy is the performing the FTA off-record (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Off-record messages indirectly imply the FTA and include the speaker giving hints, using metaphors, asking rhetorical questions, or being ambiguous in order to protect hearer's face. A speaker's use of off-record messages when performing

an FTA lessens the threat to the hearer but is not very efficient in meeting the speaker's needs. A final politeness strategy is to not do the FTA at all (Brown & Levinson, 1987). A speaker may believe that the FTA is too risky even with the use of positive and negative politeness strategies and will decide to remove him/herself from inflicting imposition on a hearer all together. In the current study, I investigated which politeness strategies stepsiblings might use when they express potentially face-threatening emotion messages to one another.

Human beings choose to enact these politeness strategies when there is a sincere concern for their relational partner's face as well as their own and when the face-threatening act is particularly severe. Brown and Levinson (1987) referred to FTA severity as the "weightiness" of an FTA. The weightiness of an FTA is measured by the sum of three different concepts: distance, power, and ranking of imposition. Distance refers to how close or intimate the relationship is between the speaker and the hearer. Power refers to the degree to which the hearer can impose his or her own plans and face at the expense of the speaker's plans and face. In other words, power refers to how much authority and control one relational partner has over the other. Imposition refers to the degree to which an FTA interferes with one's positive face needs (i.e., anything devaluing the worth, credibility, and self-esteem of another) and negative face needs (i.e., anything requiring one's goods or services). The ranking of impositions is based primarily on cultural standards (e.g., standards of beauty, success, intelligence, or strength). However, rankings can also be based on personal standards or idiosyncratic characteristics of the relational partners (Metts, 2005). By this standard an FTA may be considered especially severe to one couple, while remaining completely non-threatening

to another couple. Based on the perceived weightiness of an FTA, relational partners then choose the appropriate politeness strategy to enact in that particular relational situation. The appropriate choice is crucial to individual well-being as well as the quality of the relationship itself.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that there are potential individual and relational “payoffs” associated with each of the politeness strategies. When a speaker chooses to go bald on-record, he or she does so often in his or her own self-interest. For example, a speaker can get credit for his or her honesty or outspokenness. The speaker can even avoid the danger of being seen as a manipulator or of being misunderstood by the relational partner. Choosing to go on-record with positive politeness, however, serves more relational purpose. A speaker can assure that he or she cares about the relational partner’s needs and wants. In addition, the use of positive politeness creates a sense of “weness” for relational partners. The speaker indicates that he or she and the hearer are equal participants or benefactors of the FTA. Going on-record with negative politeness or with indirectness allows a speaker to show respect and deference to his or her relational partner and, thus, the speaker avoids incurring future relational debt for performing the FTA (i.e., relational harmony is maintained). Choosing to not do the FTA at all saves face all together; however, a speaker’s inaction means that he or she failed to communicate with his or her relational partner. This failure to communicate may have positive or negative relational implications as well. Therefore, for the stepsibling relationship, it is important to understand what constitutes a “weighty” or serious face-threatening emotion act and how, if at all, the use of politeness strategies affects the quality of the stepsibling relationship and to investigate whether the use of politeness

strategies when expressing emotion affects the way stepsiblings perceive one another and the new stepfamily. In the next section of the theoretical rationale, I summarize the contributions Politeness Theory has made to the study of interpersonal relationships and how this same theory could benefit the study of stepsibling relationships.

Contributions of Politeness Theory

Scholars have illustrated how individuals use politeness strategies in a variety of relational contexts. For example, Johnson, Roloff, and Riffe (2004) investigated the use of politeness strategies while enacting the face-threatening acts of requests and refusal of requests between friends. The researchers found that during a refusal of a request, the requester's negative face is more threatened than the refuser's negative face needs. In addition, Erbert and Floyd (2004) investigated the use of politeness strategies in delivering affectionate messages between platonic friends. The researchers argued that expressions of affection can stroke a hearer's positive face while simultaneously threatening his or her negative face. Direct affectionate messages were found to be the most supportive of positive face and the most threatening of negative face. Finally, Trees and Manusov (1998) investigated the influence of nonverbal behaviors on face during criticisms between female friends. The use of certain nonverbal behaviors did influence perceptions of politeness, specifically, "raised eyebrows, a pleasant facial expression, close tight gestures, direct body orientation, the presence of touch, and a soft voice communicate concern for face in female friendship dyads, when accompanying bald on-record strategies" (p. 578). Other researchers such as Morgan and Hummert (2000) have examined face-threatening acts in familial relationships. The researchers compared younger, middle-aged, and older adults' perceptions of mother-daughter dyad control

strategies. Morgan and Hummert (2000) found that direct control strategies such as bald-on-record strategies were evaluated negatively compared to indirect or off-record strategies.

Politeness theory has also been used to understand effective social support. For example, Goldsmith and MacGeorge (2000) investigated how the speaker-hearer relationship and the use of politeness strategies can mitigate face threats and enhance the effectiveness of *advice* messages, which are potentially face-threatening acts. In a study coming closest to the examination of emotion messages as FTAs, Caplan and Samter (1999) compared younger and older adults' perceptions of potentially face-threatening *support* messages when they were communicated using multiple politeness strategies. The researchers also investigated how helpful and sensitive certain support messages are to a recipient's face needs. Across age groups, positive politeness strategies were viewed as more helpful or sensitive to face needs than negative politeness strategies. Indeed, the use of politeness strategies when expressing emotion has been shown to mitigate face-threat within interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of using Politeness Theory as a theoretical framework in the current study was to highlight stepsiblings' perceptions of emotional expression as face-threatening acts and how stepsiblings use politeness strategies to help mitigate the threat to face. Finally, the use of politeness strategies in emotional communication may affect the quality of the interpersonal relationship as well (Metts & Lamb, 2002). A reciprocal relationship exists in that relational partners' choice of expression may influence relational quality (e.g., level of satisfaction) and the couple's level of satisfaction may also influence how relational partners choose to express emotion. Thus, politeness

researchers have shown how various types of messages constitute face-threatening acts and how the use of politeness strategies is associated with individuals' perceptions of the quality of their relationships. In the current study, Politeness Theory was considered a useful framework for the examination of stepsibling emotional communication as a face-threatening act and how stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies was associated with stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship. In the final section of the theoretical rationale, I apply Politeness Theory to the study of emotional communication as a face-threatening act within stepsibling relationships.

Politeness Theory and Stepsibling Relationships

Stepsiblings face a number of complex communicative challenges during the divorce and remarriage process that elicit powerful emotional experiences and expressions. While little is known about the experience and expression of specific emotions within the stepsibling relationship, Fitness and Duffield (2004) have argued that the communication of emotion may affect stepsiblings' perception of the quality their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. Politeness researchers have argued that the strong expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion can be considered a potentially face-threatening act for both positive and negative face and the use of politeness strategies during the expression of emotion messages may mitigate the threat to face as well as relational partners' level of satisfaction with their relationship. Therefore, I chose to ground the current study in Politeness Theory for two main reasons. First, Politeness Theory allowed me to analyze stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies when expressing specific emotions to one another. Upon establishing stepsibling emotion profiles that outline the specific emotions stepsiblings are likely to

experience and express, I wanted to understand which type of politeness strategies stepsiblings use when expressing particular positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions. In reference to the expression of positive emotion, I posed the following research question.

RQ5. What types of politeness strategies do stepsiblings use when expressing positive emotion to their stepsibling?

Due to the differing face-threatening nature of negative emotions compared to positive emotions (Brown & Levinson, 1987), it is important to assess whether stepsiblings' choice of politeness strategies will change based on the valence of the expressed emotion. In reference to the expression of strong negative and weak negative emotion, I posed the following research question.

RQ6. What types of politeness strategies do stepsiblings use when expressing negative emotion to their stepsibling?

The second reason I chose Politeness Theory to guide the current study was because it allowed me to investigate how, if at all, the use of politeness strategies in each emotional expression may be associated with stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. Based on the patterns of interdependencies involved in families, Fitness and Duffield (2004) argued that the expression of emotion by one family member will naturally affect other family members. As emotions are exchanged between two family members, their relationship becomes characterized by the types of emotions expressed. Therefore, a reciprocal pattern may exist within a stepsibling relationship where emotional expression is influenced by the quality of the relationship and the quality of the relationship is influenced by the

emotions expressed (Metts & Lamb, 2002). The use of politeness strategies may further influence how stepsiblings perceive emotional expression and, thus, how they perceive the quality of their relationship. Therefore, I posed the following research questions.

RQ7a. How, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship?

RQ7b. How, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship?

In addition, Fitness and Duffield (2004) argued that the emotions expressed between two family members will affect overall family functioning as well. According to Leake (2007) when family members feel a sense of belonging within the larger family system, it is helpful in the construction of their identity as a member of that family. The presence of stepsiblings in the larger stepfamily system can influence stepchildren's sense of belonging and their perception of a shared stepfamily identity (Leake, 2007). Indeed, Rosenberg and Hajal (1985) argued that the success of developing stepfamilies is influenced specifically by the communication between stepsiblings. Therefore, stepsibling emotional communication may affect stepsiblings' perceptions of a stepfamily identity. The use of politeness strategies may also influence how stepsiblings perceive emotional expression and, thus, how they perceive the entire stepfamily. As such, I posed following research questions.

RQ8a. How, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily?

RQ8b. How, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily?

Based on these research questions, the current study explored the positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions that characterize the stepsibling relationship and how, if at all, the use of politeness strategies during the expression of these emotions had implications for how stepsiblings perceive the quality of their relationship with the stepsibling and their perception of the entire stepfamily. The current study is beneficial in understanding how effective emotional communication between stepsiblings may be prescriptive of effective stepfamily functioning. Therefore, the findings of this have important implications for both emotion and stepfamily researchers. In the next chapter, I detail the pilot study I conducted in order to develop a coding framework that would allow me to understand how, if at all, stepsiblings use politeness strategies during emotional communication within their relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

Pilot Study

The purpose of the main study was two-fold. My first goal focused on developing an emotion profile or profiles that would characterize the stepsibling relationship. Through the lens of Politeness Theory, my second goal explored how, if at all, the expression of emotion between stepsiblings is related to stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and of the relationships they have within the larger stepfamily system. In an effort to meet these goals in understanding the relationship between stepsibling politeness in emotional expression and stepsibling and stepfamily perception, I first needed to develop a politeness strategy coding framework. A coding framework would allow me to identify categories of politeness strategies for emotional expression specific to the stepsibling relationship. In order to develop a proper coding framework, I needed to ensure that the open-ended items on the questionnaire would solicit the appropriate responses from the participants. Participants needed to write a description of the exact expression of both positive and negative emotion they made to their stepsibling. Therefore, I piloted the study questionnaire (See Appendix A) to assist in the development of a politeness strategy coding framework.

In this chapter, I discuss the procedures, participants, instrumentation, analysis, and results of this pilot study. I describe the participants, the procedures, and the data analyses of the main study in Chapter Three. I report the results of the study in Chapter Four and the discussion and implications in Chapter Five.

Procedures

Due to the specialized nature of the desired sample (i.e., non-biologically related stepsiblings) and limited resources, the use of a nonrandom, purposive sample was considered acceptable (e.g., see Schrodts, 2003). I used both direct and indirect sampling techniques in this pilot study. First, I entered six basic and Interpersonal Communication course sections at a large, Midwestern university and solicited participation from a variety of undergraduate students. In order to meet the criteria for participation, students needed to be at least 18 years of age or older, a member of a stepfamily in which he or she has at least one stepsibling, and the individual must have at one time (if he or she was not currently) cohabitated with a stepsibling(s) a minimum of 25% percent of a year for at least one year. Using the 25% criteria has been useful in recruiting participants for previous stepfamily research (Lamb 2004a; 2004b). Students meeting these criteria voluntarily completed the questionnaire, and in classes where instructors authorized, students received extra credit for participation in a study (actual class credit was determined by individual instructor).

Second, I also used a snowball sampling technique, asking participants who had already completed a questionnaire, additional students who did not meet the criteria, other faculty members, and members of the my social network to pass on a recruitment flyer with my contact information and information about the study to individuals who met the participation criteria. Those participants who were solicited through snowball sampling contacted me and arranged a time and place to meet so that they could complete the informed consent and fill out the questionnaire. Again, in classes where the instructor authorized it, students responsible for finding a participant received extra class credit.

The main purpose of the pilot study was to develop a coding framework that would allow me to categorize the use of politeness strategies within positive and negative emotional expressions. In addition, piloting the questionnaire ensured that the open-ended items on the questionnaire did indeed produce participants' written accounts of a time they expressed both a positive and negative emotion to their stepsibling. Therefore, I set up a time and place to meet with the first five respondents who completed the questionnaires. I asked the participant to read and sign the informed consent and to fill out the questionnaire according to the directions outlined in each section. After the participant completed the questionnaire, I asked the participant to identify any area on the questionnaire that he or she did not understand or directions that needed further explanation. Each participant was also asked to identify any errors in grammar, spelling, spacing, etc., he or she may have noticed while completing the questionnaire. I took notes from the five participants and made the appropriate changes to the questionnaire before distributing the remaining questionnaires. Including the initial five, a total of 40 questionnaires were distributed and 32 were returned. Upon receipt of the questionnaires, I separated the informed consent forms from the questionnaire and placed them in a separate file to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Participants were asked to complete a four-section questionnaire consisting of (a) open-ended questions concerning a time when they expressed an emotion to their stepsibling, (b) scales concerning their perception of their stepsibling and stepfamily relationship, (c) scales concerning their emotional experiences and expression within their stepsibling relationship, and (d) demographic information.

Participants

In the pilot study, participants were 32 adult stepsiblings, including five males and twenty-seven females. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 35 with a mean age of 21.16 ($SD = 3.15$). The majority of the participants were white (81.3%) and 18.8% were African American. When asked how long stepsiblings had been a member of their stepfamily (i.e., when did their stepfamily begin?), responses ($n = 32$) ranged from 3 to 20 years with a mean length of time of 12.44 years ($SD = 4.67$). Twenty participants reported on their stepsibling relationship within their biological mother and stepfather's family, while twelve participants reported on their stepsibling relationship within their biological father and stepmother's family. When asked which stepsibling they would be reporting on thirteen participants reported on their stepbrother, while nineteen participants reported on their stepsister. The age of stepsiblings ranged from 11 to 36 with a mean age of 21.28 ($SD = 5.05$). Seventy-eight percent of the reported stepsiblings were white, 18.8% were African American, and 3.1% were Hispanic.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of several sections. In the first section, participants were asked to describe their interactions with their stepsiblings, their perception of the quality of their relationship with their stepsibling, and their perception of shared stepfamily identity during the expression of a positive emotion. In the second section, participants asked to describe their interactions with their stepsiblings, their perception of the quality of their relationship with their stepsibling, and their perception of shared stepfamily identity during the expression of a negative emotion. Within the third section, participants were asked to complete six scales concerning the experience

and expression of both positive and negative emotion. Finally, in the fourth section, participants were asked to supply demographic information.

Descriptions of Interactions. In the first section of the questionnaire, I asked participants to provide me with written descriptions of an interaction with a stepsibling. If participants had more than one stepsibling, he or she chose which stepsibling they would like to report on. The first written description instructed participants to describe a time when they expressed a positive emotion toward a stepsibling:

*Please think about your relationship with one of your stepsiblings. Think back to a time in your relationship with this stepsibling when you expressed what you consider to be a **positive** emotion to him or her. I am going to ask you several questions about what happened in this situation:*

Participants were then asked to identify the positive emotion they believe they expressed as well as provide a detailed description of the situation they were in when they expressed the positive emotion to their stepsibling. In addition, participants were asked to provide a detailed description of how they expressed the positive emotion to their stepsibling:

Please write out what you said to your stepsibling. Do your best to write out the exact words you remember saying to your stepsibling. Please be as complete and detailed as possible in describing what you said to your stepsibling.

Participants were asked to write out the exact words they remember saying to their stepsibling to ensure that there was a message to analyze for the use of politeness.

Keeping the expression of the reported positive emotion in mind, participants were then asked a few questions about the positive emotional expression:

How long ago did this emotional expression occur?; How difficult was it for you to express that specific positive emotion to your stepsibling?; How difficult was it for you to express positive emotion of any kind to your stepsibling?

Stepsibling Relationship Quality. Participants completed a version of Banker and Gaertner's (1998) Stepparent-Stepchild Relationship scale that the researcher adapted for the stepsibling relationship. Banker and Gaertner's original version consisted of five items assessing the extent a stepchild agreed or disagreed with statements describing his/her relationship with his/her stepparent at the time (e.g., *"I could count on my stepparent to be supportive;" "I could count on my stepparent to be cooperative;" "My stepparent and I had serious, personal talks;" "My stepparent generally did not support me if I had a disagreement with my parent;" "My stepparent made me feel like a stranger in the stepfamily home."*). In their study, the scale produced strong reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .83. For the adaptation, the researcher replaced the word stepparent with stepsibling.

Shared Stepfamily Identity. Participants were asked to fill out a version of Banker and Gaertner's (1998) Cognitive Representation of the Stepfamily scale the researcher adapted as well. The original version consisted of statements about four types of stepfamily representations (e.g., *One-group: "Living in my house, it felt like there was one family;" Two-groups: "Living in my house, it felt like there were two separate families;" Two-sub-groups-within-one-group: "Living in my house, it felt like there were two smaller families in one larger family;" Separate-individuals: "Living in my house, it felt like we were all separate individuals."*). Participants were asked to rate from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) how much each representation characterized their stepfamily. In

their study, each item appeared twice in their survey instruments and the two separate ratings were combined. Banker and Gaertner reported Cronbach's alpha equaled .80-.96. For the adaptation, the researcher changed the wording from "*Living in my house*" to "*Living in my stepfamily home*" for all four stepfamily representations and asked which statement best described the participant's stepfamily.

In an effort to understand the potential difference between the experience and expression of a positive versus negative emotion within the stepsibling relationship, in the second section of the questionnaire, participants were instructed to follow the same steps outlined in the first section on positive emotion; however, participants reported on a time when they expressed either a strong negative or weak negative emotion toward a stepsibling. The valence of emotion is significant because researchers have argued that the experience and expression of positive and negative emotion can be face-threatening having implications on the quality of an interpersonal relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000).

Positive and Negative Emotion. Participants were then asked to complete a third section of the questionnaire consisting of six scales that I developed. The creation of the scales was necessary due to the lack of stepsibling emotion measurement available. All six scales consisted of the same list of 22 positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion terms gleaned from past researchers' ideas of which emotions are considered positive, strong negative, and weak negative (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). (i.e., *anger, resentment, happiness, sadness, pity, fear, pride, envy, loneliness, like, frustration, hate, disappointment, forgiveness, jealousy, annoyance, love, disgust, gratitude, guilt, embarrassment, shame*). Participants were asked to complete each scale with the same

stepsibling they had been reporting on in sections one and two in mind. The six scales measured participants' rating of the type of experienced emotion, the frequency of experienced emotion, the intensity of experienced emotion, and frequency of expression. For three of the scales participants were asked to recall and rate the experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion toward and about that stepsibling during the first year that they lived together in the same household. The first of these scales measured the frequency of experienced emotions by asking participants to identify how often they experienced each emotion on the scale in reference to their stepsibling during the first year of living together on a seven-point scale (1 = Never; 7 = Quite Often). The second of these scales measured the intensity of experienced emotions by asking participants to identify how intensely they felt each emotion on the scale in reference to their stepsibling during the first year of living together on a seven-point scale (1 = Very Weakly; 7 = Very Strongly). The third scale measured frequency of expression by asking participants to identify how often each emotion on the scale was expressed in reference to their stepsibling during the first year of living together on a seven-point scale (1 = Never; 7 = Quite Often).

For the other three scales participants were asked to rate the experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion toward and about that stepsibling currently. The first of these scales measured the frequency of experienced emotions by asking participants to identify how often they experienced each emotion on the scale currently in reference to their stepsiblings on the same seven-point scale (1 = Never; 7 = Quite Often). The second of these scales measured the intensity of experienced emotions by asking participants to identify how intensely they feel each

emotion on the scale currently in reference to their stepsibling on the same seven-point scale (1 = Very Weakly; 7 = Very Strongly). The third scale measured frequency of expression by asking participants to identify how often they express each emotion on the scale currently in reference to their stepsibling on the same seven-point scale (1 = Never; 7 = Quite Often). These scales were designed to measure participants' ratings of the type of experienced emotion, the frequency of experienced emotion, the intensity of experienced emotion, and frequency of expression.

Demographic Information. Participants were also asked to provide demographic information about themselves and their stepsiblings by completing a demographic information page. This section contained questions concerning both participant and reported stepsibling's age, sex, ethnic background, level of education, and length of relationship (i.e., when his or her stepfamily began). In addition, participants were also asked how often they see and/or live with their stepsibling(s) and in what home (i.e., Mother/Stepfather stepfamily or Father/Stepmother stepfamily).

Data Analysis and Development of Coding Framework

In order to develop a coding framework for politeness strategies, I first read through the 32 written descriptions of the expression of both positive and negative emotion to "identify the presence of a politeness strategy prior to categorizing specific strategies" (Kunkel, Wilson, Robson, Olufowate, & Soliz, 2004, p.19). The purpose of this was to find usable written descriptions in which a speaker did indeed use a politeness strategy during the expression of emotion. I went through the written descriptions a second time and highlighted specific phrases that represented the expression of emotion. At that point, I separated the highlighted emotional expressions by valence and recorded

them in a separate notebook, comparing each expression to one of the more specific positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, or bald-on-record strategies listed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The following discussion summarizes specific politeness strategies used within the stepsibling relationship for both positive and negative emotion.

Positive Emotion. A speaker's use of a positive politeness strategy is meant to stroke the positive face of a hearer (i.e., communicating that the hearer is valued and appreciated). When analyzing the positive emotional expressions, five of the 15 potential positive politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) emerged from the data. *Giving compliments* refers to noticing, attending, and/or approving of a stepsibling's interests, wants, need, and/or actions. *Using terms of endearment* refers to moments when one addresses a stepsibling by using a conventional or personal idiom (e.g., honey, sweetheart, brother, sister). *Participating in small talk* refers to stepsiblings spending time talking together about miscellaneous issues face-to-face, telephonically, or electronically. *Making offers or promises of closeness and cooperation* refers to stepsiblings' expressions of cooperation with other's wants, needs, and feelings. Emotional expressions using this strategy may be distinguished from "giving compliments" because the messages were considered more intense (Kunkel et al., 2004). *Joking* refers to telling funny stories or making personal jokes with stepsiblings. Examples of these five positive politeness strategies may be found in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Coding Framework-Politeness Strategies for Positive Emotion

Positive Politeness Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Giving compliments	Noticing, attending, and/or approving of stepsibling's interests, wants, needs, and/or actions	It's great to see you! Your girlfriend is so cute, you guys look good together. You were amazing! You are doing really well.	S's ability to <i>Claim Common Ground</i> Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (interests, wants, needs, goods) Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
Using terms of endearment	Addressing a stepsibling by using a conventional or personal idiom (e.g., honey, sweetheart, brother, sister)	Honey,I had a great time with you. You are my best friend. It feels like we are sisters. You're still my sister.	S's ability to <i>Claim Common Ground</i> Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers
Participating in small talk	Stepsiblings spend time talking together about miscellaneous issues face-to-face, telephonically, or electronically	How's work? How is Mom and Dad? Hey, Mark! How are you?	S's ability to <i>Claim Common Ground</i> Strategy 7: Presuppose, raise, assert common ground (e.g., Gossip, small talk)
Making offers or promises of closeness and cooperation	Stepsiblings' express cooperation with other's wants, needs, feelings	You can tell me anything, everything will be alright. You can come talk to me if you ever need to.	S's ability to <i>Convey that S and H are Cooperators</i> Strategy 10: Offer, promise

Joking	Telling funny stories or making personal jokes with stepsiblings	Let me tell you a funny story. I knew you were really smart (LOL).	S's ability to <i>Claim Common Ground</i> Strategy 8: Joke
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Note: "S" = Speaker; "H" = Hearer –Theoretical Fit column based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory original strategies.

Negative Politeness Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Giving deference	Stepsibling downplays his or herself in order to highlight other's interests or achievements	I would never have the guts to do that. I will try to stay out of your way as much as possible.	S's ability to <i>Don't Coerce H</i> Strategy 5: Give deference
Apologizing for request/imposition	Stepsibling offers some kind of apology for issue	I know this experience is new to both of us, so all I ask is for respect. Thank you again for taking me places, it means a lot that you are willing to help me out when no one else was able to.	S's ability to <i>Communicate S's want not to impinge on H</i> Strategy 6: Apologize (e.g., admit impingement, indicate reluctance)

Bald-On-Record Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Using emotion term	Stepsibling's use of exact emotion term to express experience emotion	I am so proud of you! I love you! I'm so excited for you!	Do the FTA without redressive action Direct expression or demand

Note: "S" = Speaker; "H" = Hearer –Theoretical Fit column based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory original strategies.

A speaker's use of a negative politeness strategy is meant to support a hearer's negative face (i.e., communicating respect for the hearer's autonomy). When analyzing the positive emotional expressions, two of the 10 potential negative politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) emerged from the data. *Giving deference* refers to when a stepsibling downplays his or herself in order to highlight other's interests or achievements. *Apologizing for request/imposition* refers to a stepsibling offering some kind of apology for an issue between them (see Table 2.1 for the two negative politeness strategy examples).

A speaker's use of a bald-on-record strategy indicates that a speaker does the face threatening act (FTA) without showing any effort to reduce threat to hearer's face. This is usually an attempt on the speaker's behalf to be clear, concise, and unambiguous for the hearer. During analysis of the positive emotional expressions, one bald-on-record strategy was identified. *Using emotion term* refers to the stepsibling's use of the exact emotion term to express the experienced emotion (see Table 2.1 for examples of the bald-on-record strategy). Analysis of emotional expression found no use of off-record strategies for positive emotion.

Negative Emotion. When analyzing the negative emotional expressions, the researcher did not identify the use of positive politeness strategies; however, two of the 10 negative politeness strategies developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) emerged from the data. *Questioning or hedging* refers to stepsiblings' use of questions or phrases that would minimize threat to the other. *Apologizing for request/imposition* refers to when stepsibling offers some kind of apology for issue between them. Examples of the two

negative politeness strategies for negative emotional expression can be found in Table 2.2.

A speaker's use of off-record strategies is meant to perform the FTA in an indirect manner. Off-record strategies lessen the threat to the hearer but are not very efficient in meeting the speaker's needs. When analyzing the negative emotional expressions, two of the 15 off-record strategies identified by Brown and Levinson (1987) emerged from the data. *Silent treatment* refers to ignoring or avoiding interaction with stepsibling to signify an experienced negative emotion. *Tattle-telling* refers to stepsiblings telling a parent about the other's poor behavior (see Table 2.2 for examples of the two off-record strategies within negative emotional expressions).

Again, a speaker's use of a bald-on-record strategy indicates that a speaker does the FTA without showing any effort to reduce threat to hearer's face. This is usually an attempt on the speaker's behalf to be clear, concise, and unambiguous for the hearer. During analysis of the negative emotional expressions, two bald-on-record strategies were identified. *Using emotion term* again refers to stepsiblings' use of the exact emotion term to express the experience negative emotion. *Using hurtful messages* refers to stepsiblings' use of name calling or put-downs on the other stepsibling (see Table 2.2 for examples of the two bald-on-record strategies).

Table 2.2

Coding Framework-Politeness Strategies for Negative Emotion

Negative Politeness Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Questioning or Hedging	Stepsibling use of questions or phrases minimize threat to other	<p>Do you really <i>think</i> it safe to be doing that all the time?</p> <p>Next time I clean, <i>could</i> you <i>please</i> try to keep things picked up?</p> <p>Why are Mom and Dad cool with you moving out and not happy that I decided to move?</p> <p>Why are you acting like this?</p>	<p>S' ability not to</p> <p><i>Presume or Assume</i></p> <p>Strategy 2: Question, hedge</p>
Apologizing for request/imposition	Stepsibling offers some kind of apology for issue	<p>Hey, I'm sorry but your mom can be a real problem sometimes.</p> <p>I'm sorry, but you need to quit relying on everyone else, sometimes you need to do it for yourself.</p>	<p>S's ability to</p> <p><i>Communicate S's want not to impinge on H</i></p> <p>Strategy 6: Apologize (e.g., admit impingement, indicate reluctance)</p>
Rationalize and Reason ^a	Stepsibling discusses issue with frankness	<p>This is unacceptable. You won't leave my disaster in my room.</p> <p>I don't feel that you have the right to talk to her that way, you need to treat her with respect.</p>	<p>S's ability to</p> <p><i>Be Direct</i></p> <p>Strategy 1: Be direct, by being conventionally indirect</p>

Note: "S" = Speaker; "H" = Hearer –Theoretical Fit column based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory original strategies.

^a Rationalize and Reason category emerged from data in main study.

Off-Record Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Silent Treatment	Ignoring or avoiding interaction with stepsibling to signify an experienced negative emotion	<p>I would just ignore her.</p> <p>I've said nothing to him in months.</p> <p>Don't talk to me, I don't care what you have to say.</p>	<p>S's ability to be</p> <p><i>Vague and Ambiguous</i></p>
Tattle-Telling	Stepsiblings tell a parent about the other's poor behavior	<p>I would tell my mom on him for everything.</p> <p>I'm going to tell my mother!</p> <p>I didn't talk to her, but I did to my mother.</p>	<p>S's ability to be</p> <p><i>Vague and Ambiguous</i></p> <p>Strategy 14: Displace H (change targets and hope H gets the message)</p>

Note: "S" = Speaker; "H" = Hearer –Theoretical Fit column based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory original strategies.

Bald-On-Record Strategies			
Category	Definition	Example	Theoretical Fit
Using emotion term	Stepsibling's use of exact emotion term to express experience emotion	<p>I hate you!</p> <p>I was terribly worried about you.</p> <p>I don't like you because we have to pay for you to go to college.</p>	<p>Do the FTA without redressive action</p> <p>Direct expression or demand</p>
Using hurtful messages	Stepsiblings use of name calling or put-downs on other	<p>The whole world does not revolve around you!</p> <p>That is my shirt, take it off, Bitch!</p> <p>You make me sick!</p> <p>If you wouldn't have moved in, we wouldn't be having as many problems</p>	<p>Do the FTA without redressive action</p> <p>Direct expression or demand</p>
Physical Attack ^b	Stepsibling nonverbally expresses emotion through violence	Pushing, kicking, punching, etc.	<p>Do the FTA nonverbally without redressive action</p>

Note: "S" = Speaker; "H" = Hearer –Theoretical Fit column based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory original strategies.

^bPhysical Attack category emerged from data in main study.

Results

Once the emotional expressions were categorized into a specific type of politeness strategy, I developed Table 2.1 for positive emotion and Table 2.2 for negative emotion to represent the coding framework that was used to complete the content analysis within the larger study. The coding framework was divided into four columns for each type of politeness strategy. The first is the name or category of the specific politeness strategy. The second column represents the definition of the specific politeness category (i.e., what the strategy looked like in the context of the stepsibling relationship). The third column is a list of examples that represent each category of politeness strategies (i.e., the emotional expressions from participants' written descriptions). Finally, the fourth column is the explanation of the theoretical fit. In other words, it identifies how the researcher developed the categories based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

For positive politeness there were three broad mechanisms, each containing a set of specific strategies for a total of 15. For negative politeness there were five broad mechanisms containing a set of specific strategies for a total of 10. There were two broad mechanisms for the 15 off-record strategies and, of course, only one broad mechanism for bald-on-record (i.e., direct expression or demand). Including the theoretical fit within the coding framework helped to ensure that I and subsequent coders would properly code for politeness strategies within the written descriptions of emotional expressions for both positive and negative emotion. In Table 2.1, I report the positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies for positive emotion. In Table 2.2, I report the negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies for negative emotion.

Completing the pilot study allowed me to create a functional coding framework to be used in the data analysis of the main study. In the following chapter, I describe the methods used in the main study once I had a completed politeness strategy coding framework.

CHAPTER THREE

Method

With the development of the politeness strategy coding framework from the pilot study, I completed the data collection for the main study. In this chapter, I describe the participants, procedures, and data analyses from the main study. I report the results from the main study in Chapter Four and the discussion and implications from the main study in Chapter Five.

Participants

Participants for the main study were 187 adult stepsiblings who met three separate criteria in regard to age and stepfamily situation. First, individual participants were at least 18 or 19 years of age (Note: Most states require study participants to be at least 18 years old. However, institutional guidelines in one of the Midwestern states in which participants were recruited required study participants to be at least 19 years of age or older). Second, individual participants were members of a stepfamily in which they had at least one stepsibling. Finally, individual participants had at one time (if not currently) cohabitated with a stepsibling(s) a minimum of 25% percent of a year for at least one year. Using the 25% criteria has been useful in recruiting participants for previous stepfamily research (Lamb 2004a; 2004b).

Participants included 103 males and 84 females, ranging in age from 18 to 57, with a mean age of 20.7 ($SD = 3.25$). The majority of the participants were white (86.1%), 7 % were African-American, 5.3% were Asian, 0.5% were Hispanic, 0.5% were Indian, and 0.5% marked his/herself as Other. When asked how long stepsiblings had been a member of their stepfamily (i.e., when did their stepfamily begin?), responses

ranged from 14 to 465 months with a mean length of time of 128.74 months ($SD = 68.23$). The majority of the participants reported on their stepsibling relationship within their biological mother and stepfather's stepfamily (51.6%, $n = 96$), while the remaining participants reported on their stepsibling relationship within their biological father and stepmother's stepfamily (48.4%, $n = 90$). One participant chose not to answer that question. When asked which stepsibling they would be reporting on 99 participants reported on their stepbrother, while 86 participants reported on their stepsister. The age of the stepsiblings ranged from 9 to 54 with a mean age of 20.75 ($SD = 5.49$). Of the reported stepsibling, 87.6% were white, 5.4% were African-American, 5.4% were Asian, 1.1% was Hispanic, and 0.5% marked his/hers stepsibling as Other.

Procedures

A variety of participant recruitment methods were used in the main study including classroom solicitation as well as snowball and network sampling. Recruitment flyers were read aloud and distributed in various sections of communication courses at three Midwestern universities. Students meeting the participation criteria were asked to attend one of several data collection sessions run by myself and/or a colleague acting as a proctor. Students who did not meet the participation criteria were asked to pass on the recruitment flyer to other individuals who did, inviting them to one of the data collection sessions. Out of the 187 total study participants, 85 attended one of these sessions where they were provided an informed consent form and instructions for the questionnaire were detailed. Participants were asked to read and sign two copies of an informed consent form approved by my university's institutional review board. The participant was told to keep one copy for his/her records and to return the other copy to me or the proctor. The

collected informed consent forms were then stored in my locked office and were kept separate from the completed questionnaires.

Participants were then asked to complete the four-section questionnaire described in Chapter Two on the pilot study. The questionnaire consisted of: (a) open-ended questions concerning a time when they expressed an emotion to their stepsibling, (b) measures assessing perception of their stepsibling and stepfamily relationship, (c) measures assessing emotional experiences and expression within their stepsibling relationship, and (d) demographic information (see Pilot Study for description). The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete and all questionnaires were completed anonymously. In classes where instructors granted permission, students who completed a questionnaire or found an individual to complete a questionnaire, were awarded credit for participation in a study. After completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation and were asked to pass along the recruitment flyer to individuals meeting the participation criteria so that they may attend subsequent data collection sessions.

During a second round of data collection, recruitment flyers were once again read aloud and distributed in various sections of communication courses at three Midwestern universities. However, during this data collection round, potential participants were directed to the same confidential version of the questionnaire accessible online. Additionally, I used network sampling at this juncture, by asking others in my social network to complete an online questionnaire if they met the participation criteria and/or to pass on the recruitment flyer to other individuals who met the criteria as well. The remaining 102 total study participants completed an online version of the questionnaire.

Data Analyses

Confirmatory Factor Analysis. To answer RQ1, which asked what specific emotions represent the experience of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion within stepsibling relationships, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The CFA allowed me to see the extent to which the 22 emotion terms represented three distinct factors of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions, ultimately enabling me to collapse the 22 emotion variables into three separate constructs for analysis. The ability to collapse the 22 emotion terms into three variables also isolated weak from strong negative emotion.

One-Way Repeated-Measures ANOVA. To answer RQ2, which asked how often do stepsiblings experience positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often do they experience those emotions currently, I first ran descriptive statistics, specifically determining mean scores and standard deviations for the three emotion constructs (i.e., positive, strong negative, weak negative). To understand how the frequency of experienced emotion had changed over time, I tested for a significant change between the means of frequency for experienced emotion during the first year and the means of frequency for experienced emotion currently by conducting a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA.

To answer RQ3, which asked how intense are stepsiblings' emotional experiences in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and currently, I again ran descriptive statistics, specifically determining mean scores and standard deviations for all three emotion constructs. To understand how the intensity of

experienced emotion had changed over time, I tested for a significant change between the means of intensity for experienced emotion during the first year and the means of intensity for experienced emotion currently by conducting a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA.

To answer RQ4, which asked how often do stepsiblings express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions to one another during the first year of living together and currently, I once again ran descriptive statistics, specifically determining mean scores and standard deviations for all three emotion constructs. To understand how the frequency of expressed emotions has changed over time, I tested for a significant change between the means of frequency for expressed emotions during the first year and the means of frequency for expressed emotions currently by conducting a one-way repeated-measures ANOVA.

Content Analysis. The remaining RQs focused on the written messages in the first part of the questionnaire. Thus, for RQs 5-8b, a content analysis was conducted to compare the frequencies and percentages of the stepsiblings' open-ended responses. (Babbie, 2007; Huck, 2004). I trained a coder unfamiliar with the specifics of the study using the coding framework I developed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) five communicative politeness strategies (i.e., bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, not at all). The coding framework allowed me and the coder to analyze the emotional expression messages for politeness strategies directed toward positive and negative face of the speaker (i.e., study participant) and the target (i.e., study participant's stepsibling). Because no coding framework existed in the current literature, developing a new coding framework to create category systems for constructs (e.g.,

politeness strategies and emotional expression) is appropriate practice (Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 1998).

During the training session, the trained coder and I read through a portion ($n = 20$) of the written descriptions of the expression of both positive and negative emotion to identify the presence of a politeness strategy prior to categorizing specific strategies (Kunkel, et al., 2004). The purpose of this process was to find usable written descriptions where a speaker did indeed use a politeness strategy during the expression of emotion. Second, we categorized each of the identified strategies based on the coding framework developed for this study which is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theorizing. Any disagreements between us during the first and second steps of content analysis were addressed through discussion until consensus was reached (Kunkel et al., 2004).

Following the training session, we independently rated approximately 20% of the responses ($n = 45$) to check for intercoder reliability. For example, if the coder analyzed an open-ended response for positive emotional expression and decided that a participant's response fit one of the coding framework categories, the response was coded as present for the corresponding category. However, if a coder determined that a participant's response fit more than one of the coding framework categories, the response was coded as present for all applicable categories. During these situations when it seemed like a participant's response fit more than one category, the coder looked for primacy within the response in order to determine which category was most represented. Whichever category deemed by the coder to be the primary category of the participant's response was included in the assessment of intercoder reliability. The same process was followed for negative emotional expressions.

We produced strong intercoder reliability for both positive and negative emotional expression (See Table 3.1). For RQ 5, examining positive emotional expressions, simple agreement was 82.5%, with a Cohen's Kappa of .78. For RQ6, examining negative emotional expressions, simple agreement was 82.9%, with a Cohen's Kappa of .79.

Table 3.1

Coder Simple Agreement and Cohen's Kappa Reliability Scores

Research Questions	% of Simple Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
RQ 5 – Positive Emotional Expressions	82.5	.78
RQ 6 – Negative Emotional Expressions	82.9	.79

Note. Scores were calculated based on the initial 20% of the participant surveys.

Since reliability was acceptable, the remaining responses were divided evenly among the two coders. To account for potential “coder drift,” we both read and analyzed the final 10% of the responses (Kunkel et al., 2004). Again, we demonstrated strong reliability with the final 10% of the questionnaires ($n = 20$) (See Table 3.2). For RQ 5, examining positive emotional expressions, simple agreement was 82.6%, with a Cohen's Kappa of .79. For RQ6, examining negative emotional expressions, simple agreement was 77.3%, with a Cohen's Kappa of .68.

Table 3.2

Coder “Drift” Simple Agreement and Cohen’s Kappa Reliability Scores

Research Questions	% of Simple Agreement	Cohen’s Kappa
RQ 5 – Positive Emotional Expressions	82.6	.79
RQ 6 – Negative Emotional Expressions	77.3	.68

Note. Scores were calculated based on the final 10% of the participant surveys.

During the content analysis of the data from the main study additional politeness strategies emerged during the expression of negative emotion. Specifically, another negative politeness strategy and a bald-on-record strategy emerged from the data. As a negative politeness strategy *Rationalize and reason* refers to stepsiblings being frank and candid with their stepsibling about an issue as a way to minimize negativity. Finally, the only nonverbal bald-on-record strategy, *Physical attack*, refers to stepsiblings expressing emotion through physical violence.

After the coding process, I answered the remaining research questions. To answer RQ5, which asked what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings use when expressing positive emotion to their stepsibling, I ran descriptive statistics, specifically determining frequencies and percentages of total.

To answer RQ6, which asked what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings use when expressing negative emotion to their stepsibling, I also ran descriptive statistics, specifically determining frequencies and percentages of total.

To answer RQ7a, which asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings’

perceptions of the quality of their relationship, I conducted a between-subjects ANOVA to discover if there was a relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion and stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Because of unequal group sizes for politeness strategies (based on the coding framework), Welch's variance weighted term for the linear trend was utilized.

To answer RQ7b, which asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship, I conducted a between-subjects ANOVA to discover if there was a relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion and stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Because of unequal group sizes for politeness strategies (based on the coding framework), Welch's variance weighted term for the linear trend was utilized.

To answer RQ8a, which asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily, I compared politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion across the four groups representing the cognitive representations of the stepfamily from the adapted Banker and Gaertner's (1998) Cognitive Representation of the Stepfamily scale by generating chi-square contingency tables.

To answer RQ8b, which asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily, I compared politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion across the four groups representing the cognitive representations of

the stepfamily from the adapted Banker and Gaertner's (1998) Cognitive Representation of the Stepfamily scale by generating chi-square contingency tables.

In this chapter, I described the participants, the procedures, and the data analyses of the main study. In the next chapter, I summarize the results of the main study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

In this chapter, I summarize the results from the analysis discussed in Chapter Three. I addressed the first goal of this study in the first four research questions (RQs 1-4) by examining the specific emotions stepsiblings report they experience, the intensity of those emotional experiences, and the extent to which they express these emotions when they first begin living together in the same household, and how that experience and expression may change over time. Using a Politeness Theory framework, I addressed the second goal of this study with RQs 5-8b, by examining the relationship between emotional expression and perceptions of the stepsibling relationship and the stepfamily as a whole.

Emotion Profile

In RQ 1, I asked what specific emotions represent the experience of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion within stepsibling relationships. In order to create subscales for positive and negative emotions, I identified items within the six emotion scales based on past research stating which emotions were considered positive, weak negative, and strong negative (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each time period and specific inquiry (e.g., frequency of experience, intensity, and frequency of expression). Results confirmed that the 22 emotion terms did indeed load into three separate constructs, (as indicated by acceptable model fit using X^2 , RMSEA, CFI, and NFI indices), which I represent as positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion. However, due to divergent validity issues (e.g., dual loadings) for some of the models, the emotion terms envy,

disappointment, and shame were dropped from the analysis. Therefore, the final six positive emotion items included pride, happiness, liking, forgiveness, loving, and gratitude. The final seven strong negative emotion items included anger, resentment, jealousy, hate, annoyance, frustration, and disgust. The final six weak negative emotion items included sadness, pity, fear, loneliness, guilt, and embarrassment.

Coefficient alphas were computed to obtain internal consistency estimates of reliability for all six emotion scales (See Tables 4.1-4.3).

Table 4.1

Coefficient Alphas for the Experience of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotion During the First Year and Currently

	<u>First Year</u>	<u>Currently</u>
Positive	.81	.85
Strong Negative	.88	.90
Weak Negative	.76	.76

Table 4.2

Coefficient Alphas for the Intensity of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotion During the First Year and Currently

	<u>First Year</u>	<u>Currently</u>
Positive	.87	.85
Strong Negative	.91	.91
Weak Negative	.84	.83

Table 4.3

Coefficient Alphas for the Expression of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotion During the First Year and Currently

	<u>First Year</u>	<u>Currently</u>
Positive	.86	.87
Strong Negative	.92	.91
Weak Negative	.87	.86

Therefore, in reference to RQ1, the 22 emotion terms on the emotion scales represented three separate emotion constructs (i.e., positive, strong negative, weak negative), which are assumed to be a coherent and reliable measure for assessing the frequency and intensity of an emotional experience as well as the expression of emotion within a stepsibling relationship.

Frequency of Emotional Experience

In RQ2, I asked how often stepsiblings experience positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often they experience those emotions currently. Out of the 187 participants, 186 completed the emotion scales in their entirety. In Table 4.4, I present the means and standard deviations for positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions experienced during the first year of living together and currently.

Table 4.4

Mean and Standard Deviations for the Experience of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotion During the First Year and Currently

	<u>Positive</u>		<u>Strong Negative</u>		<u>Weak Negative</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First Year	4.33	1.11	3.80	1.33	2.87	1.08
Currently	4.72	1.30	2.48	1.19	2.26	.93

Note. Frequency measured on a 7-pt scale with higher scores representing a high level of frequency of an experienced emotion.

Positive Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of positive emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 21.70, p < .01, n^2 = .11$. Therefore, participants' experience of positive emotion in reference to their stepsibling increased over time.

Strong Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of strong negative emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 151.89, p < .01, n^2 = .45$. These results suggest that participants' experience of strong negative emotion decreased over time.

Weak Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of weak negative emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 68.99, p < .01, n^2 = .27$. These results suggest that participants' experience of weak negative emotion also decreased over time.

Intensity of Emotional Experience

For RQ3, I asked how intense stepsiblings experience positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how intense they experience those emotions currently. Table 4.5 presents the means and standard deviations for the intensity of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotional experiences during the first year of living together and currently.

Table 4.5

Mean and Standard Deviations for the Intensity of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotional Experiences During the First Year and Currently

	<u>Positive</u>		<u>Strong Negative</u>		<u>Weak Negative</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First Year	3.97	1.28	3.58	1.48	2.77	1.22
Currently	4.55	1.40	2.36	1.25	2.11	1.01

Note. Intensity measured on a 7-pt scale with higher scores representing a high level of intensity of an experienced emotion.

Positive Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of intensity of positive emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 35.79, p < .01, n^2 = .16$. Therefore, the intensity of participants' experience of positive emotion in reference to their stepsibling increased over time.

Strong Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of intensity of strong negative emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 109.15, p < .01, n^2 = .37$. These results

suggest that the intensity of participants' experience of strong negative emotion decreased over time.

Weak Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of intensity of weak negative emotions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 70.19, p < .01, \eta^2 = .28$. These results suggest that the intensity of participants' experience of weak negative emotion also decreased over time.

Frequency of Emotional Expression

For RQ 4, I asked how often do stepsiblings express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often do they express those emotions currently. Table 4.6 presents the means and standard deviations for positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions expressed during the first year of living together and currently.

Table 4.6

Mean and Standard Deviations for the Expression of Positive, Strong Negative, and Weak Negative Emotion During the First Year and Currently

	<u>Positive</u>		<u>Strong Negative</u>		<u>Weak Negative</u>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First Year	3.88	1.26	3.51	1.48	2.71	1.23
Currently	4.50	1.42	2.47	1.23	2.12	1.05

Note. Frequency measured on a 7-pt scale with higher scores representing a high level of frequency of an expressed emotion.

Positive Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of positive emotion expressions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 39.19, p < .01, n^2 = .18$. Therefore, participants' expression of positive emotion in reference to their stepsibling increased over time.

Strong Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of strong negative emotion expressions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 82.30, p < .01, n^2 = .31$. These results suggest that participants' expression of strong negative emotion decreased over time.

Weak Negative Emotion. There was a significant difference in terms of frequency of weak negative emotion expressions from the first year of stepfamily development to the current state of the relationship, $F(1, 185) = 51.32, p < .01, n^2 = .22$. These results suggest that participants' expression of weak negative emotion also decreased over time.

Politeness Strategies

Through the lens of Politeness Theory, I examined the relationship between both positive and negative emotional expression and perceptions of the stepsibling relationship and the stepfamily as a whole.

Positive Emotion. In RQ 5, I asked what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings use when expressing positive emotion to their stepsibling. Since no coding framework existed in the current literature that connected emotional expression with politeness strategies for the stepsibling relationship, I developed a framework based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) five communicative politeness strategy categories (i.e., bald

on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, not at all) upon completion of a pilot study. In order to analyze the data in the main study, the coding framework outlined eight strategies within three categories of politeness strategies specific to the expression of positive emotion in the stepsibling relationship (i.e., positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record). During analysis, the coders looked for primacy within participants' responses in order to determine which category was most represented. Of the 187 participant in this study, 176 responded to RQ 5. Table 4.7 presents the eight positive emotion politeness strategies and their frequency of use.

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics for Positive Emotion Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	% of Total
Giving Compliments	35	19.9
Participating in Small Talk	31	17.6
Using Emotion Term	30	17.0
Making Offers or Promises	26	14.8
Using Terms of Endearment	19	10.8
Giving Deference	16	9.1
Joking	12	6.8
Apologizing	7	4.0

Note. $N = 176$ strategies

Frequency of Positive Emotion Politeness Strategies. Giving compliments ($n = 35$) constituted 19.9% of the total of politeness strategies for positive emotional expression. This is considered a positive politeness type of strategy in Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy referred to stepsiblings reporting that they noticed, attended to, and/or approved of their stepsibling's interests, wants, needs, and/or actions. For example, one participant wrote about feeling

pride for her younger stepsister who had just finished her dance recital. She told her stepsister: “Anna, awesome job in your dances, you rocked! I was really impressed, you smiled a lot and looked great on stage, it was a fun show to watch.” Another participant wrote about expressing how happy she was for her stepsister after she gave birth to twins. She reported: “Congratulations! You have done an amazing thing! I can’t believe you’re a mom now!” In an effort to express pride in her stepsister’s relationship choices, another participant told her stepsibling, “You are a beautiful girl, just for the perfect guy [that] God has in store for you.” Another stepsibling complimented his stepbrother’s performance in the school musical stating: “You did great! I didn’t know you were that good and I am so proud of you!”

Participating in small talk ($n = 31$) represented 17.6% of the total reported politeness strategies. Small talk is also considered a positive politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy centered on stepsiblings spending time talking together about miscellaneous issues face-to-face, telephonically, or electronically. For example, one participant wrote about feeling happy that he was finally connecting to his stepbrother at a family dinner by just talking about their respective interests. He said to his stepbrother: “What did you think about those college football games last weekend? Pretty crazy huh?” Another participant wrote about a time she was happy to see her stepbrother and wanted to try and make more of an effort with him so she engaged him in a conversation: “Hey, how are you? What have you been up to? So, have you seen this movie?” Another participant also commented on using a simple greeting to express happiness in seeing her stepbrother after a night out with friends. She explained the exchange and reported:

Participant: "It's nice to see you. What's been new with you?"

Stepbrother: "Not a whole lot, you?"

Participant: "Nothing. It's nice to see you, I haven't seen you in awhile."

Stepbrother: "Yeah, you too. Well, I'll shut my game off so you can go to bed."

Participant: "Thanks, have a good night."

Stepbrother: "Yeah, you too."

Another stepsibling reported how happy she was to include her stepsister in some "girl time" with her group of friends by just asking her if she wanted to join:

Participant: "I'm having friends over today and we are going to be doing our nails and hair, do you want to join us?"

Stepsister: "Yes, that would be fun!"

Actually using the emotion term ($n = 30$) represented 17.0% of the reported politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this is considered a bald-on-record type of strategy because stepsiblings reported simply using the exact emotion term in a verbal expression of the experienced emotion. For example, one participant wrote about telling her stepsibling how happy she was that they spent the day together. She stated: "I'm *glad* we were able to go sledding and I'm *glad* you came." Another participant wrote about admitting how happy she was that her stepsister had moved in. She wrote: "I'm *happy* you moved in. I feel like we have some really good times together." Another participant explained the moment when he felt like his stepbrother was really his brother and he wanted to share his love for him. He wrote: "At that moment, I really began thinking of him as another brother. And then when he got out of the car, I yelled out at him 'I *LOVE* YOU!'"

Making offers of promises of closeness and cooperation ($n = 26$) accounted for 14.8% of the strategies. This is a positive politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy focused on participants expressing their cooperation with their stepsibling's wants, needs, and feelings. One participant wrote about the family Christmas where he explained finally feeling happy to have new family. He said to his stepsibling:

It has been a few months since our parents married, and in that time we haven't spent much time together. However, I wanted to let you know how glad I am that you are part of our family and how excited I am to get to know you better.

Another participant echoed this sentiment and reported saying to her stepsibling: "I enjoy spending time with you and we should do it more often." Another participant wrote about a time she felt happiness while helping her stepsister with her homework. She told her: "I can always help you with whatever you need in the future, whether it be homework or other problems that you may have."

Using terms of endearment ($n = 19$) represented 10.8% of the reported politeness strategies. According to Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, it is also considered a positive politeness strategy, where emotional expressions show participants addressing a stepsibling by using a conventional or personal idiom (e.g., honey, brother, or sister). For example, one participant wrote about an exchange she had with her stepsister about their feelings of joy as new sisters:

Participant: "I have always wanted a sister, now it's like I kind of have one."

Stepsister: "There's no 'kind of' about it, I would be happy to call you my real sister."

Participant: "I'm sure we could pass as real sisters, we act alike and look alike."

Stepsister: Well then it's settled, from today forward, I guess we are sisters!"

Another participant explained how he expressed his excitement to his stepbrother the first day they spent real time together. He told him: "I'm really glad I have a new baby-brother." Another participant reported how appreciative she was of her new stepsibling and said, "I'm happy to have a sister and another girl in the house to share my thoughts with."

Giving deference ($n = 16$) accounted for 9.1% of the strategies. Deference is considered a negative politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy refer to when participants reported downplaying themselves in order to highlight their stepsibling's interests or achievements. For instance, one participant wrote about expressing his pride in his stepbrother who was adjusting to life in the United States from Australia. He told him: "The way you've handled all the turmoil, I don't think that I could handle it the way that you have. I'm proud of you man, and I'm here for you." Another participant expressed her happiness to her stepbrother for taking her shopping and spending time with her. She stated: "Are you sure? You really don't have to do that for me, but thank you so much." Another participant explained her happiness that her stepsister gave her a very expensive coat for Christmas one year, stating: "You really didn't have to spend that much money on me, but I appreciate it. Thank you so much!"

Joking ($n = 12$) accounted for 6.8% of the strategies. According to Brown & Levinson (1987), joking represents a positive politeness strategy, where emotional expressions centered on telling funny stories or making personal jokes with stepsiblings.

For example, one participant wrote about how happy she felt around her stepsister when they would re-tell a funny story involving her dad: “We would always talk about his one time after dinner out, when my dad said he learned how to skip. We told him he should show us and he did! It was really funny!” Another participant wrote about a similar inside joke he and his brother shared about their goofy neighbor, Mark: “We’d start a lot of conversations with ‘Guess what Mark did this weekend?’ and we’d laugh for days.”

Apologizing for request/imposition ($n = 7$) represented 4.0% of the strategies. This is considered a negative politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy referred to stepsiblings offering some kind of apology for an issue between them. For instance, one participant wrote about telling his stepbrother how he was finally happy about having him in his life:

You know we really haven’t gotten to know each other well yet. I’m sorry that I come off sometimes as a jerk. The only reason I act like that is because I haven’t really accepted your dad and mom yet... You’re actually a pretty cool guy. I’m sorry that it took me so long to actually get to know you.

Another participant wrote about expressing how happy she was for her stepsister on her wedding day even though she didn’t really like her choice in groom. She told her stepsister:

Julie, I am so happy for you and I love you so much. I am sorry that I have been distant lately, but I know you deserve the best. I do believe now that this guy of yours will treat you like you’re supposed to be [treated].

Participants reported using eight different politeness strategies when expressing a positive emotion to a stepsibling. I will now present the reported politeness strategies that were used when stepsiblings expressed negative emotion to one another.

Negative Emotion. For RQ 6, I asked what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings use when expressing negative emotion to their stepsibling. The developed coding framework from the pilot study outlined six strategies within three categories of politeness strategies specific to the expression of negative emotion in the stepsibling relationship (i.e, negative politeness, bald-on-record, off-record). However, during content analysis in the main study two more strategies emerged from the data for a total of eight strategies for negative emotional expression. Similar to the positive emotion analysis, the coders looked for primacy within participants' responses in order to determine which category was most represented. Of the 187 participants in this study, 174 responded to RQ 6. Table 4.8 presents the eight negative emotion politeness strategies and their frequency of use.

Table 4.8

Descriptive Statistics for Negative Emotion Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	% of Total
Using Hurtful Messages	49	28.2
Rationalizing and Reasoning	39	22.4
Questioning or Hedging	34	19.5
Silent Treatment	24	13.8
Using Emotion Term	14	8.0
Apologizing	5	2.9
Physical Attack	5	2.9
Tattle-Telling	4	2.3

Note. $N = 174$ strategies

Frequency of Negative Emotion Politeness Strategies. Using hurtful messages ($n = 49$) constituted 28.2% of the total of politeness strategies for negative emotional expression. This is considered a bald-on-record type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy referred to stepsiblings reporting that they used name calling or put downs toward their stepsibling. For example, one participant wrote about being angry with her stepsister because she didn't wash her basketball uniform for her. She told her stepsister: "I can't believe how stupid you are to forget that. Now I have to play a game in a stinky ass uniform...I don't believe that you forgot to wash it, you were just being a bitch." Another participant explained how she expressed jealousy over parental attention to her stepsibling and reported: "He's not your real dad. I'm his real daughter, not you." Another participant wrote about being angry with her stepsister for not respecting her stuff. She told her: "I am sick of having you around and in my life." When her stepbrother interrupted movie night with her friends, one participant reported expressing anger at him. She yelled: "This is total fucking bullshit, my friends and I were here first, and you're just being a little bitch cuz my dad's not here!" Another participant expressed his anger at his stepbrother over a videogame. He told him: "Shut up. You're not even supposed to live here!"

Rationalizing and Reasoning ($n = 39$) represented 22.4% of the total politeness strategies. Emerging from the data during content analysis in the main study, to rationalize and/or reason is considered a negative politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy dealt with stepsiblings being very frank and candid with their stepsibling about the issue, so that the negativity would

stop between them. For example, one participant wrote about how angry she was with her stepsister for driving drunk, but she decided to talk about it calmly. She told her:

I am extremely irritated and upset with you. How in the world could you have gotten behind the wheel? You know how strongly I feel about not drinking and driving. You've seen me upset about losing friends in accidents. God forbid something should happen to you--you mean too much to me and I couldn't imagine life without you! Please don't ever do something like that again.

Another participant explained how she handled her anger when her stepsister kept taking her clothes without asking. She told her stepsister: "You need to ask to borrow my things, or I won't let you borrow them again." Dealing with jealousy over parental attention, another participant told her stepsibling: "It's just not fair that you get so much more stuff than us." Another participant expressed his frustration to his stepbrother for not helping out during a move. He told his stepbrother: "Eric, put down the damn cigarette and come help us out. Seriously, this starting to get ridiculous."

Questioning or hedging ($n = 34$) represented 19.5% of the total strategies. This is also considered a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) because stepsiblings reported using questions or phrases to minimize the threat to their stepsibling during an emotional expression. For example, one participant explained how frustrated she was about her stepbrother getting married to someone he had only known for a few months. She asked him: "Kyle, are you sure? I mean you've only known her a few months. The first few months are the 'honeymoon stage.' I think you should wait a little longer to get engaged, I don't want you to get hurt." Another participant expressed anger to her stepsister for not helping to clean around the house. She asked her: "Laura, what

are you doing? Could you help me out here a little bit? Why don't you do a little something?" When discussing differences in their religion, one participant reported on her frustration with her stepsibling. She asked him: "How are you so sure that everything you believe is actually true? What if there's other beliefs or facts out there that say otherwise?"

Silent treatment ($n = 24$) accounted for 13.8% of the strategies. This is an off-record type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) because stepsiblings reported ignoring or avoiding interaction with their stepsibling as a way to signify they experienced a negative emotion. For example, one participant wrote about her sadness about having to share her family with a new stepsibling: "There were not any words really just ignoring. Normally, I would be very talkative and loving, but to him, I just said nothing." Another participant used silent treatment to punish her stepsibling when she felt jealous. She wrote: "I would typically ignore him and try not to speak to him when he spoke to me."

Actually using the emotion term ($n = 14$) accounted for 8.0% of the total strategies. It is a bald-on-record strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where stepsiblings reported using the exact emotion term to express the experienced emotion. For instance, one participant expressed her anger to her stepbrother for taking her car without asking. She told him: "I am so mad at you right now. I can't believe I am a part of this family." Several participants expressed feelings of hatred by simply telling their stepsibling: "I hate you!"

Apologizing for request/imposition ($n = 5$) accounted for 2.9% of the strategies. Apologizing is considered a negative politeness type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy referred to stepsiblings offering some

kind of apology for an issue between them. For example, one participant explained how she was angry with her stepsister about not listening to the house rules. She told her: "I'm sorry, but I agree with my mother's rules. I know you're mad at her, but this time, I can't really agree with you." Another participant explained how sad she was about leaving her stepsibling after a summer together. She told her: "I'm sorry I have to go. I hope you understand that even though I'm not here, I'll be thinking about you. I'm just a little sad to leave."

Physical attack ($n = 5$) also accounted for 2.9% of the strategies. Considered a bald-on-record type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), physical violence often accompanied stepsiblings' use of hurtful messages, but in five cases, participants actually reported that they hit their stepsibling without saying anything at all. For example, one participant explained that he expressed anger at his stepbrother by getting physical during a pick-up basketball game. He wrote: "I intentionally ran into him. It broke out into a five second physical fight where he punched me and I kicked him." Similarly, another participant wrote about being angry with his stepbrother for taking the car when it wasn't his turn: "I walked fast right upstairs in to the game room and pushed him."

Tattle-telling ($n = 4$) represented 2.3% of the total strategies. This is an off-record type of strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Emotional expressions using this strategy referred to participants expressing their displeasure to their parent(s), rather than with their stepsibling. For example, one participant explained how sad she was that her stepsibling didn't make time for her when she came to visit. She wrote: "We didn't talk about it. I would just tell my dad she hurt my feelings." Another participant wrote about being angry with her stepsister for tattle-telling on her, so she returned the favor. She

explained: “I did not confront my stepsibling about this issue. I just told my stepfather that it was her who was smoking and drinking and that I didn’t know why she would want to cause problems.”

Stepsibling Relationship Quality

With a sense of what type of politeness strategies stepsiblings used when expressing both positive and negative emotion to their stepsibling, I focused on discovering whether the use of politeness strategies influenced stepsiblings’ perceptions of the quality of their relationship and their perceptions of a shared stepfamily identity.

Therefore, in RQ 7a, I asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings’ perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Based on unequal group sizes for politeness strategies I conducted a Welch’s ANOVA to discover if there was a relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion and stepsiblings’ perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Table 4.9 presents the means and standards deviations of the quality of the stepsibling relationship for each type of positive emotion politeness strategy.

Table 4.9

Means and Standard Deviations of the Quality of the Stepsibling Relationship for Types of Positive Emotion Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Giving Compliments	3.95	.62
Participating in Small Talk	4.00	.99
Using Emotion Term	4.28	.83
Making Offers or Promises	4.00	.74
Using Terms of Endearment	4.04	.80
Giving Deference	4.45	.82
Joking	3.98	.75
Apologizing	4.00	.99

Note. Relationship Quality measured on a 7-pt scale with higher scores representing a high level of relationship satisfaction.

There was no significant relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship, $F(7, 48.59) = .95, p = .48$.

In RQ 7b, I asked how, if at all, is the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Based on unequal group sizes for politeness strategies I conducted a Welch's ANOVA to discover if there was a relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion and stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Table 4.10 presents the means and standards deviations of the quality of the stepsibling relationship for each type of negative emotion politeness strategy.

Table 4.10

Means and Standard Deviations of the Quality of the Stepsibling Relationship for Types of Negative Emotion Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Using Hurtful Messages	3.37	.87
Rationalizing and Reasoning	3.72	.90
Questioning or Hedging	3.38	.85
Silent Treatment	3.38	.91
Using Emotion Term	3.33	.82
Apologizing	3.32	1.31
Physical Attack	2.20	.86
Tattle-Telling	4.40	1.21

Note. Relationship Quality measured on a 7-pt scale with higher scores representing a high level of relationship satisfaction.

There was no significant relationship between the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship, $F(7, 22.22) = 2.12, p = .08$.

Shared Stepfamily Identity

For RQ 8a, I asked how, if at all, does the use of politeness strategies in the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily. I conducted a two-way contingency table analysis to evaluate whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during positive emotional expression was related to their perceptions of a shared stepfamily identity. Table 4.11 presents the eight positive emotion politeness strategies percentages for the four family identity categories. Politeness strategies for positive emotional expression and stepfamily identity were not significantly related. Pearson $X^2(21, N = 176) = 22.78, p = .36$.

For RQ 8b, I asked how, if at all, does the use of politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion between stepsiblings related to stepsiblings' perceptions of their entire stepfamily. I conducted a two-way contingency table analysis to evaluate whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during negative emotional expression was related to their perceptions of a shared stepfamily identity. Table 4.12 presents the eight negative emotion politeness strategies percentages for the four family identity categories. Politeness strategies for negative emotional expression and stepfamily identity were not significantly related. Pearson $X^2(21, N = 176) = 18.45, p = .62$.

Overall, my results indicated stepsiblings' experience and expression of emotion was a function of the stage of their relationship. However, despite the fact that stepsiblings did use politeness strategies during the expression of positive and negative emotion, their use of politeness does not seem to be associated with stepsiblings' perceptions of the quality of their relationship or their perceptions of the entire stepfamily. In the next chapter, I present the discussion and implications of the main study.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics for Positive Emotion Politeness Strategies for the Four Family Identity Categories

	One Family	Two Families	Two Families in One	Separate Individuals
Politeness Strategy	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total
Giving Compliments	15.0	34.4	20.0	11.1
Participating in Small Talk	16.2	12.5	20.0	33.3
Using Emotion Term	21.2	15.6	12.7	11.1
Making Offers or Promises	11.2	12.5	23.6	.0
Using Terms of Endearment	10.0	6.2	12.7	22.2
Giving Deference	11.2	6.2	5.5	22.2
Joking	10.0	6.2	3.6	.0
Apologizing	5.0	6.2	1.8	.0

Note. $N = 176$ strategies

Table 4.12

Descriptive Statistics for Negative Emotion Politeness Strategies for the Four Family Identity Categories

	One Family	Two Families	Two Families in One	Separate Individuals
Politeness Strategy	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total	% of Total
Using Hurtful Messages	29.5	29.6	18.4	38.1
Rationalizing and Reasoning	29.5	19.7	21.1	19.0
Questioning and Hedging	15.9	15.5	31.6	19.0
Silent Treatment	11.4	15.5	15.8	9.5
Using Emotion Term	9.1	8.5	2.6	14.3
Apologizing	2.3	2.8	5.3	.0
Physical Attack	2.3	5.6	.0	.0
Tattle-Telling	.0	2.8	5.3	.0

Note. $N = 174$ strategies

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

In this main study, I used Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as a theoretical framework to examine the emotional communication within the stepsibling relationship and how it may influence overall stepfamily functioning. Specifically, I addressed two goals. My first goal was to provide an emotional profile or profiles that characterized the stepsibling relationship. My second goal explored how, if at all, the expression of emotion between stepsiblings is related to stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and of the stepfamily as a whole. The results of this study have important implications for emotional communication and stepfamily researchers and practitioners alike.

My findings provide some indication of the types and valence of emotions that stepsiblings experience and express within their stepsibling relationships. In addition, through the development of a coding framework specific to stepsibling emotional communication, my results also indicate the types of politeness strategies that stepsiblings use when expressing both positive and negative emotion to their stepsibling. In this chapter, I: (a) interpret and explain the results for the development of a stepsibling emotional profile and stepsiblings use of politeness strategies in emotional expression, (b) discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings on the existing emotional communication and stepfamily research, (c) detail the limitations of the study and (d) present the directions for future research.

Stepsibling Emotion Profile

The communicative challenges associated with the formation of the stepsibling relationship have the power to elicit a considerable amount of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions between stepsiblings (Coleman et al., 2004, Fitness & Duffield, 2004; Lamb 2004a; 2004b; Metts et al., 2009; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). However, the specific type or valence of emotions stepsibling experience and express is relatively unknown considering there has been little research conducted concerning this type of stepfamily relationship. Therefore, it was important to develop an emotion profile for stepsibling relationships, which allowed me to explore how stepsibling experience and express emotions toward one another during the early stages of relational development and how that may change over time. Thus, in the first research question (RQ1), I asked what specific emotions represent the experience of positivity, strong negativity, and weak negativity within the stepsibling relationship.

By conducting a confirmatory factor analysis for RQ 1, I sought to determine that the items on the emotions scales used in the study did indeed represent three distinct factors of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions experienced and expressed in a stepsibling relationship. The CFA confirmed that the 22 emotion items gleaned from past researchers' idea of which emotions are considered positive, strong negative, and weak negative within interpersonal relationships (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Planalp, 1999; Metts et al., 2009; Metts & Planalp, 2002) could be collapsed into the three separate constructs. A total of six items clustered into one factor which I represented as positive emotion within stepsibling relationships including, pride, happiness, liking, forgiveness, loving, and gratitude.

The CFA also clustered the negative emotion items into two separate factors which I represented as strong negative and weak negative emotion. Because of divergent validity issues (e.g., dual loadings), however, three of the original 22 emotion items including, envy, disappointment, and shame, were dropped from the analysis. Thus, seven items that clustered into a separate factor I represented as strong negative emotion experienced and expressed in stepsibling relationships including, anger, resentment, jealousy, hate, annoyance, frustration, and disgust. I represented the remaining six clustered emotions including, sadness, pity, fear, loneliness, guilt, and embarrassment as weak negative emotion within stepsibling relationships.

The results of the CFA are important in confirming that stepsiblings seem to experience emotions similar to those researchers have deemed as positive, strong negative, and weak negative within any other type of interpersonal relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Guerrero & Andersen, 2000; Planalp, 1999; Metts et al., 2009; Metts & Planalp, 2002). Therefore, in terms of the type of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions experienced, a stepsibling emotion profile likely mirrors any interpersonal relationship emotion profile where relational partners share personal knowledge of one another and are interdependent (Metts & Planalp, 2002). The results of RQ 1 also support researchers' argument that relational partners distinguish between what constitutes strong negative and weak negative emotions within interpersonal relationships (Metts & Planalp, 2002). However, a stepsibling relationship is a unique type of interpersonal relationship, possessing characteristics similar to a close, family relationship and characteristics of an impersonal, casual relationship, perhaps changing how the emotion is experienced or expressed (Coleman et al., 2004; Rosenberg

& Hajal, 1985). Thus, a complete stepsibling emotion profile not only includes the type of experienced emotion, but also the extent and manner in which a stepsibling experienced the emotion (Fitness & Duffield, 2004). In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how often stepsiblings experienced positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions within their relationships and how intense those experiences were.

Frequency and Intensity of Emotional Experience

Despite the fact that stepsibling experience the same types of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions as most interpersonal relationships, which particular emotions are experienced and when may be a function of the complex nature of stepsibling relational development. For example, in most interpersonal relationships, early stages of the relationship are characterized by the experience and expression of positive emotion and less negative emotion (Aune et al., 1994). However, the challenges that stepsiblings face as the new stepfamily develops has elicited powerful experiences and expressions of negative emotion (Lamb 2004b). Therefore, in RQ 2, I asked how often stepsiblings experienced positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and how often they experienced those emotions currently, while in RQ 3, I explored the intensity of stepsiblings' emotional experiences in their relationships with their stepsiblings during the first year of living together and the intensity of those emotional experiences currently. My results indicated that the valence, frequency, and intensity of stepsiblings' emotional experiences were a function of the stage of their relationship.

Positive Emotion. For RQ 2, my results indicated that stepsiblings tended to experience positive emotion toward and about their stepsibling more often during the

later stages of the relationship. In other words, stepsiblings reported experiencing less positive emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported experiencing currently. For RQ 3, my results indicated that stepsiblings' positive emotion experiences were more intense in the later stages of the stepsibling relationship. This means stepsiblings reported less intense positive emotional experiences during the first year of living together than they reported experiencing currently.

Although these findings are inconsistent with the findings of most interpersonal communication researchers, who claim relational partners tend to experience and express more positive emotion during the early stages of the relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999), it is consistent with what is known about the complex emotional nature of new stepfamily relationships. Burrell (1995) argued that the early stages of stepfamily formation are fraught with negativity. Stepsibling relationships are especially susceptible to negativity due to the initial competition over resources, parental attention and affection, and physical space (Coleman & Ganong, 1993; Lamb, 2004a; Walsh, 1992). For example, Lamb (2004a) found that during the early stages of the relationship, stepsiblings rarely felt positive regard for their new stepsiblings because they had yet to accept them as a new addition to their home and to their family. The development of positive regard for stepsiblings seems to be an issue of time for most stepsiblings. My results indicated that the passage of time seems to influence stepsiblings' experience of negative emotions as well.

Strong Negative Emotion. For RQ 2, my results indicated that stepsiblings tended to experience strong negative emotion toward and about their stepsibling more

often during the early stages of the relationship. In other words, stepsiblings reported experiencing more strong negative emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported experiencing currently. For RQ 3, my results indicated that stepsiblings' strong negative emotion experiences were more intense in the early stages of the stepsibling relationship. This means stepsiblings reported more intense strong negative emotional experiences during the first year of living together than they reported experiencing currently. Similar results were found for weak negative emotions as well.

Weak Negative Emotion. For RQ 2, my results indicated that stepsiblings tended to experience weak negative emotion toward and about their stepsibling more often during the early stages of the relationship. Again, stepsiblings reported experiencing more weak negative emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported experiencing currently. For RQ 3, my results indicated that stepsiblings' weak negative emotion experiences were more intense in the early stages of the stepsibling relationship. This means stepsiblings also reported more intense weak negative emotional experiences during the first year of living together than they reported experiencing currently.

These findings are once again inconsistent with research from interpersonal communication scholars about the experience and expression of emotion based on stage of the relationship. Most researchers suggest that relational partners would rarely experience negative emotions with much intensity during the early stages of an interpersonal relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999). In fact, Aune et al. (1994) argued,

that early stages of interpersonal relationships are less conflict ridden, which would lessen the experience of strong negative emotion like anger or rage. Relational partners are also likely to still be harboring “promising images and fantasies about [their] partner,” which would likely mean the experience of weak negative emotion would be minimal (p. 142). In other words, it would be difficult to feel sadness and/or fear in relation to my relational partner when I am painting him/her in such a positive light. However, as one of the most conflict-ridden relationships in remarriage families (Coleman & Ganong, 1993; Lamb, 2004a; Walsh 1992), the opposite is true for most stepsiblings. Role uncertainty and boundary ambiguity during the initial stages of stepfamily formation tend to cause an array of strong and weak negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, anger, and jealousy for stepchildren (Lamb, 2004b; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985; Speer & Trees, 2007). Indeed, Leake (2007) found that the presence of stepsiblings during the formation of a new stepfamily was related to stepchildren feeling a lower level of family belonging.

One possible explanation for the increase in frequency and intensity of the positive emotion experience and a decrease in the frequency and intensity of strong negative and weak negative emotion within the stepsibling relationship over time could be increased relational certainty. Speer and Trees (2007) found that when stepchildren had a clearer sense of their role within the stepfamily as well as the role of other stepfamily members, they reported higher levels of overall satisfaction with their stepfamily experience. In addition, Freisthler et al. (2003) argued that while stepchildren cite conflict and emotional stress as one of the worst things about living within a stepfamily during the early years of its formation, upon reflection stepchildren admitted that new stepfamily members ultimately provided the benefit of added emotional support

in their lives. Although these scholars concentrated on the stepchild/stepparent relationship, it is likely the same issues could influence stepsibling relationships as well. The more comfortable a stepsibling becomes with the new stepfamily formation and their place within it, the more likely they may feel positive emotion toward a stepsibling.

My findings concerning stepsiblings' emotional experiences expose an important context of study for emotional communication researchers. Stepsiblings did indeed represent a unique relationship type caught somewhere in between a casual, impersonal relationship and a close familial relationship. As Metts et al. (2009) argued "the process of divorce and subsequent challenges inherent in renegotiating postdivorce relationships involve the experience and expression of complex and often contradictory emotions" (p. 336). Emotion scholars must recognize that the stepfamily represents a rich context for the examination of emotional valence. What is currently known about the experience of positive and negative emotion within interpersonal relationships, likely does not always apply to stepsiblings and perhaps does not always apply to other stepfamily relationships. This does not and should not be considered a negative characteristic of stepfamily relationships. Instead, it allows researchers to begin to identify new emotional profiles or trajectories for different types of interpersonal relationships as well as increase knowledge concerning how specific types of emotion influence relationships (e.g., hurt as in Metts et al., 2009). As Braithwaite et al. (2001) warned, treating stepfamily relationships as inferior to traditional relationships is problematic. Stepfamily relationships just represent that there is more than one way to "do" family.

Understanding the frequency and intensity of stepsibling emotional experiences, however, do not provide a complete picture of a stepsibling emotion profile. Of special

interest to communication researchers is how stepsiblings express experienced emotions within their relationship. The appropriate expression of experienced emotion has important implications for individual and relational well being (Planalp, 1999; Pennebaker, 1997). In fact, stepsibling emotional expression has implications for overall stepfamily functioning (Fitness & Duffield, 2004; Hetherington, et al., 1999; Leake, 2007; Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the relationship between stepsibling emotional expression and overall stepfamily functioning with the results from RQ 4.

Frequency of Emotional Expression

In an effort to profile the emotional complexity of the stepsibling relationship from a communication perspective, it was important that I understand whether and how stepsiblings express emotions. In RQ 4, I asked how often stepsiblings expressed positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions to one another during the first year of living together and how often they expressed those emotions currently. My results indicated that the valence and frequency of stepsiblings' emotional expressions were also a function of the stage of their relationship.

Positive Emotion. For RQ 4, my results followed the same pattern for positive emotional expression that they did for positive emotional experience. Specifically, stepsiblings tended to express positive emotion toward and about their stepsibling more often during the later stages of the relationship. In other words, stepsiblings reported expressing less positive emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported expressing currently.

These findings are, once again, inconsistent with most interpersonal research regarding emotional expression (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Frisen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999). During the early stages of relational development, cultural display rules should dictate that positive emotional expression is more socially acceptable than negative emotional expression. In fact, expressing positive emotion more often than negative emotion aids relational partners in meeting social standards for politeness (Metts & Planalp, 2002). However, these results remain consistent with my results concerning stepsiblings' emotional experience and likely for the same reasons. Due to the tumultuous nature surrounding the formation of most new stepfamilies (Baxter et al., 1999; Braithwaite, et al., 1998; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2006; Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 1993; 2004; Metts et al., 2009), stepchildren tend to have fewer positive interactions with their stepsiblings (Ganong & Coleman, 1993). Often when stepsiblings are faced with having to share intimate informational and physical space for the first time, negative emotions surface and expressed conflict becomes the communicative norm (Lamb, 2004b, Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985).

As Baxter et al. (1999) argued, positive adjustment to new stepfamily roles and boundaries could take several years in many families. Thus, just as the experience of positive emotion for stepsiblings seems to be an issue of time for most stepsiblings, so is the expression of positive emotion. This finding is theoretically consistent with what is known about the link between emotional experience and expression. Guerrero et al. (1998) argued "although emotions can be experienced and not expressed, the natural condition of emotion is that they are interpersonally expressed" (p. 9). When a stepsibling

does experience the emotion, whether positive or negative, it is likely that the expression will accompany the experience. Naturally, the passage of time seems to influence stepsiblings' expression of negative emotions as well.

Strong Negative Emotion. For RQ 4, I found similar results for strong negative emotional expression as I found for strong negative emotional experience. Stepsiblings tended to experience strong negative emotion toward and about their stepsibling more often during the early stages of the relationship. Specifically, stepsiblings reported expressing more strong negative emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported expressing currently. Again, the experience of an emotion, whether positive or negative, is often followed by its expression especially within the context of an interpersonal relationship (Guerrero et al., 1998). When stepsiblings reported experiencing strong negative emotion, their experience prompted an expression. Therefore, similar results were found for weak negative emotional expression as well.

Weak Negative Emotion. For RQ 4, my results indicated that stepsiblings tended to express weak negative emotion toward and about their stepsibling more often during the early stages of the relationship. Specifically, stepsiblings reported expressing more weak negative emotion during the first year living under the same roof with a stepsibling than they reported expressing currently.

Interpersonal researchers contradict these findings suggesting that relational partners actually tend to avoid expressing negative emotions during the early stages of an interpersonal relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999). The expression of negative emotion

is generally only considered acceptable once an interpersonal relationship has developed and matured (Aune et al., 1994; Planalp, 1999). It seems the stepsibling relationship is unique in this way, wherein negative emotional expression is characterized differently. That is, stepsiblings are expressing both strong negative and weak negative emotion as they experience it during the early stages of their relationship, regardless of it being considered inappropriate by the society at large. Once again, role uncertainty, boundary ambiguity, and increased conflict tend to leave stepchildren feeling an array of negative emotions and confused about how to behave appropriately in stepfamily interaction (Speer & Trees, 2007). As Guerrero et al. (1998) explained, stepchildren's negative emotional expression seems to be reaction to persistent negative emotion experience.

An explanation for the increase in positive emotion expression and a decrease in the strong negative and weak negative emotion expression within the stepsibling relationship over time could also be attributed to an increase in stepfamily relational certainty. During the early stages of their relationship, stepsiblings are often overwhelmed with the changes linked to the new stepfamily form (e.g., new roles and boundaries, increased conflict, etc.); changes which foster the experience of strong negative and weak negative emotions. Speer and Trees (2007) argued that stepchildren enact behaviors that emphasize their autonomy as a way to reduce or manage their relational uncertainty. DiVerniero (2007) found that stepchildren reported feeling uneasy, unnerved, and worried about the unknown changes that occurred during the formation of the new stepfamily. Even more intriguing, based on the uncertainty surrounding their relationships, stepchildren in DiVerniero's (2007) study, often considered their stepsiblings as extended stepfamily members, instead of being a part of the immediate

stepfamily. Therefore, for stepsiblings, it may be the expression of strong negative and weak negative emotions that allow stepsiblings to cope with their uncertainty during early stages of the relationship. In the end, the expression of strong negative emotion within interpersonal relationships helps meet a need to gain relational control or to try and maintain or negotiate one's role in his/her relationship (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Canary et al., 1998; Fehr et al., 1999; Salovey & Rodin, 1989). Weak negative emotional expressions notify one's relational partner of potential problems in the relationship and also help to deflect criticism from relational partners (Bradford & Petronio, 1998; O'Keefe, 2000; Sabini et al., 2001; Segrin, 1998; Zisowitz-Barr, 2000). In this respect, negative emotional expressions serve a similar function in stepsibling relationships that they do in other types of interpersonal relationships.

However, as time passes, stepsiblings' emotional expressions become more positive, which could mean stepsiblings' role within the new stepfamily becomes clearer. Speer and Trees (2007) argued that role clarity attributed to stepchildren's certainty about how to behave toward other stepfamily members. In fact, stepchildren who perceived they had a clear role in the stepfamily enacted more positive connection-seeking behaviors with their stepparent. The authors argued "a clearer role likely allows a stepchild to feel comfortable being close to his/her stepparent and safe about being able to express that closeness" (p. 390). There is reason to believe the same would be true for stepsibling interaction. Indeed, Freisthler et al., (2003) found that although it was not easy early on, as their relationships progressed, stepchildren recognized the importance of the positive emotional support stepfamily relationships afforded them. In addition, an increase in positive emotional expression in later stages of the stepsibling relationships

may also be a function of a sort of relational reciprocity. Speer and Trees (2007) argued that expressing positive emotion, such as affection, is ultimately easier if the expression is “well received and reciprocated” (p. 390). Considering the expression of positive emotion within interpersonal relationships is motivated by a need to show pleasure or contentment with one’s relational partner or even as a way to strengthen relational partners’ bond (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001; Taraban, et al., 1998), it is likely that as a stepsibling relationship progresses, positive emotional expression from one stepsibling begets positive emotional expression from the other. Politeness theorists may even argue that the increase in positive emotional expression in later stages of the stepsibling relationship is a function of the decrease in social distance between relational partners over time (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The results of the development of a stepsibling emotion profile help me extend both the emotional communication and stepfamily bodies of literature by exploring the experience and expression of emotion within stepsibling relationships, a type of stepfamily relationship that has yet to be fully explored. Specifically, the development of the stepsibling emotion profile outlines what type or valence of emotions stepsiblings tend to experience, the frequency and intensity of their experiences, and the frequency of those emotional experience expressions. Although the profile confirms emotion researchers’ ideas of what emotions constitute positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions within interpersonal relationships (Metts & Planalp, 2002), my results extend the interpersonal emotional communication research by highlighting the unique emotional nature of the stepsibling relationship. Stepsiblings’ experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion is decidedly different from the

experience and expression of emotion with in other types of interpersonal relationships (i.e., friendships, romantic relationship, and even original familial relationships), because stepsiblings are experiencing and expressing more negative emotion and less positive emotion during the early stages of the relationship than traditional interpersonal relationships.

While the generation of a stepsibling emotion profile helps explain how often and with what intensity positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions are experienced and expressed between stepsiblings, the profile does not explain how stepsiblings choose to express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), strong expression of emotion between relational partners is a type of face-threatening act because the emotional display may threaten each relational partner's ability to maintain a competent self-presentation or face (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998). Therefore, considering strong expressions of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions can be classified as face-threatening acts, exploring how stepsiblings use politeness strategies during the expression of emotion is important in understanding how appropriate or inappropriate emotional expression between stepsiblings may influence stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how Politeness Theory informed the results of this study.

Politeness Strategies

Using Politeness Theory as a theoretical framework for the main study allowed me to analyze stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion messages. Specifically, Politeness Theory

addresses the analysis of specific messages between people and how a message enhances or threatens each relational partner's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the main study the messages of interest were emotional expressions. It was important to discover if the use of politeness strategies during emotional expressions could mitigate the threat to face an emotional expressions presents and to discover if it was related to stepsibling's perceptions of the quality of their relationship. Therefore, in RQ 5, I explored what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings used when expressing positive emotion to their stepsibling.

Positive Emotion Politeness Strategies

With RQ 5, I examined the frequencies and percentages associated with each type of politeness strategy category from the politeness strategy coding framework in order to measure the relative prominence of each type of positive emotion expression message within the 176 participant messages reported in the main study. Based on my results, stepsiblings do indeed use politeness strategies and they tend to favor particular types of politeness strategies when expressing positive emotion within the stepsibling relationship.

The results showed that when using politeness strategies to express positive emotion, stepsiblings *gave compliments* often. This finding indicates that when expressing positive emotion stepsiblings tend to use positive politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness strategies are meant to be used as a "metaphorical extension of intimacy," a way to communicate that the speaker and hearer can claim common ground because they share similar desires, needs, and wants (p. 103). This is appropriate for understanding the expression of positive emotion within the stepsibling relationship. As my results of the emotion profile indicated,

stepsiblings begin to feel comfortable expressing positive emotion during the later stages of the relationship when they are better able to accept and understand not only their own role, but the role of the other stepfamily members. Giving compliments is an easy way for stepsiblings to stroke their stepsibling's positive face, effectively establishing common ground.

After giving compliments, with the exception of the politeness strategy, *using emotion terms*, my results demonstrated that stepsiblings used positive politeness strategies quite often (*i.e., participating in small talk, making offers or promises, and using terms of endearment*). When expressing positive emotion, stepsiblings use each of these positive politeness strategies as a “social accelerator” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103), which allows the stepsiblings to communicate that they would like to get emotionally closer to their stepsibling. As the next frequently reported politeness strategy, participating in small talk and everyday activities with their stepsibling, allowed stepsiblings to assert common ground and good will with one another without exposing the stepsibling's vulnerability in expressing emotion. This finding is consistent with researchers who examined how stepfamily relationships are often enacted through mundane, everyday talk messages, like small talk (Braithwaite, McBride, Schrod, 2003; Schrod, et al., 2007).

Making offers or promises was also a frequently reported positive politeness strategy for stepsiblings. Theoretically, making offers and/or promises during positive emotion expressions allows stepsiblings to stress their cooperation in maintaining a successful, functioning relationship with their stepsibling. Perhaps stepsiblings believe there is a better chance that the positive emotional expression will be accepted or

reciprocated if their stepsibling believes the two to be co-cooperators. Using terms of endearment represented another frequently reported positive politeness strategy by stepsiblings. From a politeness perspective, terms of endearment or even appropriate address terms are used to convey in-group membership. Consistent with stepfamily address term research, stepsiblings often drop the “step” prefix before brother or sister as a way to communicate their acceptance and in this case positive regard for their stepsibling (Koenig Kellas, Le-Clair-Undergerg, & Lamb Normand, 2008; Lamb 2004a, 2004b).

Of particular note, one frequently reported politeness strategy, using exact emotion term, is actually considered a bald-on-record strategy. In other words, stepsiblings found it useful to simply express the positive emotion they were experiencing directly to their stepsibling. Brown and Levinson (1987) discussed using bald-on-record strategies when maximum efficiency was very important. Relationally, this occurs when the speaker is imploring the hearer to care about him/her, the ultimate effort being to highlight how much the speaker values the hearer’s friendship. This makes sense for stepsiblings who choose to directly express a positive emotion toward their stepsibling. They may wish to highlight the growing importance and acceptance of their stepsibling relationship, again with hope that their stepsibling will return the sentiment.

Out of the final three frequently reported politeness strategies (*i.e., giving deference, joking, and apologizing*), two, giving deference and apologizing, represent a negative politeness strategy. Negative politeness strategies are employed to help keep a hearer free from restraint and imposition. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that negative politeness strategies should be considered behaviors that highlight respect for

the hearer. While positive politeness strategies aim to minimize social distance between relational partners, negative politeness is meant to enhance social distancing to a certain degree.

Giving deference was reported as a used negative politeness strategy for stepsiblings. This strategy may be reserved for stepsiblings who do not necessarily want to create added distance to their stepsibling relationship, but they may not possess the desire to become closer with their stepsibling at that particular point in their relationship. Some stepsiblings may have a more difficult time emotionally processing the challenges involved in being a member of a stepfamily despite how much time has passed. Freisthler et al., (2003) argued that the emotional stress involved in some stepchildren's stepfamily experience was so strong that the negativity persisted, affecting their lives for years to come. Using deference may allow stepsiblings to communicate to their stepsibling that even though they are expressing positive emotion toward them, they are not trying to coerce their stepsibling into any false sense of intimacy. As DiVerniero (2007) argued, stepchildren often viewed stepsiblings as an extended stepfamily member rather than an immediate stepfamily member. Therefore, they kept communication within that relationship at a "polite stranger" level, meaning they were courteous and polite with their stepsibling, but did not try to "develop the relationship beyond surface-level acquaintances" (p. 15).

The other frequently reported negative politeness strategy was apologizing. Once again, apologizing allows a stepsibling to communicate respect for their stepsibling by admitting that they realize the positive emotional expression could be threatening to their negative face. Apologizing only accounted for four percent of the total politeness

strategies used when expressing positive emotion, which could mean most stepsiblings use positive emotional expression to advance the status of the stepsibling relationship. Since positive emotional expressions tend to occur during the later stages of the stepsibling relationships, stepsiblings may feel comfortable enough with one another at this point that they want to encourage a deeper level of intimacy and, therefore, tend to use positive politeness strategies rather than negative politeness strategies.

Finally, joking is perhaps the most difficult stepsibling strategy choice to explain. Theoretically, joking represents a positive politeness strategy that is meant to assist stepsiblings in claiming common ground much like small talk. Schrodtt et al. (2007) found that joking came up second behind small talk in types of everyday talk stepfamily members use to facilitate stepfamily functioning, which makes its place in terms of frequency of use for stepsiblings in the present study questionable. It was reported less frequently than the other types of positive politeness strategies. However, it may be explained by how Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualized joking as a politeness strategy that can be distinguished from small talk. They argued that jokes are based on “mutual shared background knowledge and values” (p. 124). The very nature of the stepsibling relationship is characterized by a lack of shared family history. Perhaps, stepsiblings in the present study simply had not developed a strong enough relational history that would house a repertoire of inside jokes they could use during the expression of positive emotional expression.

In addition to using politeness strategies in their expression of positive emotion, stepsiblings also used politeness strategies in the expression of negative emotion within their stepsibling relationships. The next section of this chapter I discuss RQ 6, through

which I explored what types of politeness strategies stepsiblings used when expressing negative emotion to their stepsibling.

Negative Emotion Politeness Strategies

In RQ 6, I examined the frequencies and percentages associated with each type of politeness strategy category from the politeness strategy coding framework in order to measure the relative prominence of each type of negative emotion expression message within the 174 participant messages reported in the main study. Based on the results, stepsiblings do use some politeness strategies when expressing negative emotion, but strategies are different compared to the expression of positive emotion.

My results showed that when expressing negative emotion to their stepsibling, stepsiblings reported *using hurtful messages* often. The use of hurtful messages is actually a bald-on-record strategy, which means stepsiblings did not bother using politeness, opting to express the emotion in the form of a direct expression or demand. Bald-on-record strategies are often used when other demands override any face concerns (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is consistent with what is known about the negativity permeating the stepsibling relationship particularly early on in the new stepfamily formation. Stepchildren, after all, cited constant conflict and emotional stress as the worst aspects of growing up in a stepfamily (Freisthler, et al., 2003). Since stepsiblings tend to experience strong negative and weak negative emotion more often during the early stages of the stepsibling relationship, the expression of those negative emotions is considerably raw and likely comes at the expense of the other stepsibling. Usually stemming from the intense experience of loss for the nuclear family, stepsiblings often blame each other for their discontent with the new stepfamily situation (Rosenberg & Hajal, 1985). Therefore,

negative emotional expressions in the form of name calling and/or putdowns is selfishly motivated with little regard for the threat those types of messages have to their stepsibling's face.

Following the use of hurtful messages, stepsiblings frequently reported using two types of negative politeness strategies, *rationalizing and reasoning and questioning or hedging*. Rationalizing and reasoning represents an intriguing and seemingly contradictory type of politeness strategy that has speakers being direct with hearers by being conventionally indirect. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that it is possible to minimize the imposition caused by an FTA, such as a negative emotional expression, by “coming rapidly to the point” (p. 130). Stepsiblings honor negative face by not wasting their stepsiblings' time dancing around the issue; instead, in a generally calm manner, they express the negative emotion they are experiencing toward their stepsibling. Again, the use of negative politeness strategies allows the stepsibling to essentially maintain or even increase the amount of social distance that exists between the two stepsiblings. The other frequently reported negative politeness strategy, questioning or hedging, is perhaps the most polite of the negative politeness strategies. By using the questioning or hedging strategy stepsiblings can avoid presuming or assuming that their stepsibling is concerned or interested in their negative emotional experiences, ultimately minimizing the threat to their stepsibling's face. Stepsibling may use this because they lack the interest and energy to engage in any more conflict with their stepsibling. Freisthler et al. (2003) found that for stepchildren the “constant conflict, tension, or fear of conflict were difficult to endure” and stepchildren even felt guilty for handling stepfamily situations in ways that led to more conflict (p. 94).

Another frequently reported strategy was *silent treatment*. Silent treatment is a type of strategy Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized as off-record. They argued that off-record strategies are enacted when a speaker wants to do the FTA, but also wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, which allows the hearer to interpret the message however they wish. For stepsiblings, this represents a rather tempting passive aggressive option. Stepsiblings can effectively “punish” their stepsibling by ignoring or avoiding interaction with them; however, they do not have to commit to a potential conflict that a direct negative emotional expression could create. Consistent with Lamb (2004a, 2004b), stepsiblings tend to avoid interaction when they are really trying to communicate feelings of anger and jealousy toward a stepsibling, especially over parental attention and shared physical space.

Following silent treatment, stepsiblings frequently reported, *using emotion terms*, which is another type of bald-on-record strategy. This strategy of using the exact emotion term when expressing a strong negative or weak negative emotion to one’s stepsibling also emerged during the analysis of the expression of positive emotion between stepsiblings. Once again, the use of bald-on-record strategies occurs when the speaker believes that the message is of some urgency and more important than the concerns of face. Relationally speaking, stepsiblings would use direct expression of negative emotion when they do not fear retribution from their stepsibling. Brown and Levinson (1987) referred to this when a speaker perceived that he/she had more power in the relationship. Stepsiblings tend to use direct negative emotional expression when they are attempting to exert or maintain relational control, especially in the early stages of stepfamily formation.

The final three strategies, *apologizing*, *physical attack*, and *tattle-telling*, were reported far less often than the other strategies. Representing three of the politeness strategy categories, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record respectively, each strategy accounted for less than three percent of the total politeness strategies reported by stepsiblings. Apologizing is considered a negative politeness strategy. Similar to its use with positive emotional expression, apologizing allows a stepsibling to communicate respect for their stepsibling by admitting that they realize the negative emotional expression could be threatening to their negative face. Most stepsiblings may hesitate to express negative emotion through apology because they are unwilling to admit concern for their stepsibling's face at least during the early stages of the relationship. This may explain why it is not used as often as other politeness strategies.

Physical attack represents the only non-verbal strategy to emerge from the data and, therefore, despite its bald-on-record nature, it cannot be explained within the perimeters of Politeness Theory. Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of bald-on-record usage and polite redress is based on linguistic expression. However, it seems important to note that several stepsiblings mentioned the use of physical violence toward their stepsibling in conjunction with their direct, bald-on-record verbal expressions of negative emotion, while a total of five described the expression of their negative emotional experience as a strictly non-verbal physical exchange. Finally, tattle-telling represents an off-record strategy. Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that this allows the speaker to displace the hearer, addressing the FTA to someone who will likely not be threatened and hope that the real target of the FTA will get the message. For stepsiblings this means that they express their negative emotions to either their biological parent or their stepparent,

effectively “tattle-telling” on their stepsibling. This is consistent with Lamb’s (2004a, 2004b) findings where stepsiblings admitted they wanted their parents to handle the problem for them and they could avoid the tedium of stepsibling conflict. Despite the low percentage of stepsiblings who reported using this strategy, it is important in understanding how stepsibling emotional expression can influence not only the perceived quality of the stepsibling relationship but also the perceived quality of the entire stepfamily system. Leake (2007) argued that the presence of stepsiblings may “dilute familial resources, not only material resources, but also those of time and energy, perhaps weakening the parental and step-parental relationships central to family belonging” (p. 148).

My findings have important implications for members of stepfamilies. The emotional climate (i.e., the types of emotions experienced and expressed) within stepsibling relationships influences how stepsiblings communicate with one another and how they communicate with other stepfamily members. Stepfamily researchers need to continue to recognize that the study of emotional communication within stepfamily relationships may provide a clearer, more comprehensive understanding of the nature of stepfamily functioning. Specifically, as this main study does, researchers should view emotional communication as a process unfolding over time (as suggested in Metts et al., 2009).

From a theoretical standpoint, in answer to Goldsmith (2008), my findings explore directions for future research and application for Politeness Theory. Specifically, my results from the main study extend the scope of Politeness Theory. While Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that emotional expression could be considered FTAs, it was not

of central focus. Through the development of a politeness strategy coding framework, I showed what kind of politeness strategies stepsiblings use during emotional expression to mitigate threats to face. In addition, my results also show how face and face concerns play out in a certain social context (i.e., a stepfamily relationship). In the next section of this chapter, I continue exploring these theory extensions by discussing the relationship between politeness strategies and perception of the quality of the stepsibling relationship.

Stepsibling Relationship Quality

In addition to assisting in the analysis of stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotional expressions, Politeness Theory also framed my investigation of an association between the use of politeness strategies in emotional expression and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship. Because a stepsibling relationship is characterized by the emotional expression within it, the use of politeness strategies may be associated with how an emotional expression is perceived, and, thus, how stepsiblings perceive the quality of the relationship.

In RQ 7a, I examined whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during positive emotional expression was related to their perceptions of the quality of their stepsibling relationship. For positive emotion, my results indicate that there is no association between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of positive emotion and their perception of the quality of their relationship. In RQ 7b, I examined whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during negative emotional expression was related to their perceptions of the quality of their stepsibling relationship. My results indicate that there is no relationship between stepsiblings' use of politeness

strategies during the expression of negative emotion and their perception of the quality of their relationship as well.

Despite the fact that the development of the politeness strategy coding framework was theoretically based, results did not support an association between the use of politeness strategies for both positive and negative emotion and the stepsiblings perception of the quality of their relationship. An explanation for this could be that these stepsiblings felt that little could be done to change the way they felt about their stepsibling and how satisfied they were with the relationship at the time. Freisthler et al. (2003) argued that stepchildren reported that it was not until they matured and reflected on their relationships with stepfamily members, that they could admit that stepfamily members could have been or even were wonderful sources for emotional support in their lives. In other words, if stepsiblings' relationships are characterized by negativity, it does not matter what form of politeness a stepsibling uses, perhaps stepsiblings still perceive the relationship as less satisfying. Vice versa, if stepsiblings' relationships are characterized with more positivity, they do not need the use of politeness strategies to assist in perceiving the relationship as satisfying.

These results could also be a function of the research design rather than an accurate representation of the stepsibling relationship. Although I conducted a Welch's ANOVA to account for the unequal group sizes for politeness strategies, with a total of 187 participants in the main study, only 176 answered the portion of the questionnaire used in this analysis. This N could be considered too low to yield fairly accurate *p* values (Green & Salkind, 2005). Despite the lack of empirical research exploring emotion in stepsibling relationship, what is known, has established that stepsibling interaction

contributes to stepfamily functioning (Hetherington, et al., 1999; Leake, 2007). Thus, in the next section of this chapter, I discuss the relationship between politeness strategies and perception of the entire stepfamily.

Shared Stepfamily Identity

In RQ 8a, I examined whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during positive emotional expression was related to their perceptions of their entire stepfamily. My results indicate that there is no association between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of positive emotion and their perception of the entire stepfamily. For RQ 8b, I examined whether stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during negative emotional expression was related to their perceptions of their entire stepfamily. My findings indicate that there is no relationship between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of negative emotion and their perception of the entire stepfamily as well.

These findings seem problematic since they are inconsistent with existing research concerning stepfamily relationships (Hetherington, et al., 1999; Leake, 2007). One explanation could be based off DiVerniero's (2007) finding that some stepsiblings do not even consider their stepsiblings as a part of the immediate stepfamily; rather they represent some "stranger" in the extended stepfamily. This could be because stepsiblings are still holding on to the nuclear family version of what constitutes their immediate family or they simply have no interest in developing and maintaining a new relationship with a stepsibling.

Once again, however, these results could be a function of the research design rather than an accurate representation of the stepsibling relationship. With a total of 187

participants in the larger study, only 176 answered the portion of the questionnaire used in this analysis. This N is rather low to conduct a representative two-way contingency table (Green & Salkind, 2005). Considering the results of this study contradict what little information researchers have about the emotional nature of the stepsibling relationships, it is imperative that the research design be carried out again with a larger sample. This would allow me to conclude that the lack of an association between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and their perceptions of the stepsibling relationship and the entire stepfamily is a reality of emotional communication with the stepsibling relationship rather than a function of research design.

If there is a true lack of association between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during emotional expression and the perceptions of the stepsibling relationship and the entire stepfamily, there are important implications for those studying and working with stepfamilies. Freisthler et al. (2003) argued that stepchildren found it difficult to appreciate or understand the positive aspects of their stepfamily experience until they engaged in mature reflection of the situation. These authors highlighted the stigma that is still sometimes associated with the stepfamily (i.e., stepfamily being inferior to the nuclear family). Without adequate support from those outside the stepfamily, stepchildren found it difficult to identify as a member of the stepfamily. Therefore, stepsibling communication alone might not assist in stepsiblings perceiving a shared stepfamily identity, but rather a combination of communicative support from their other interpersonal relationships such as peers, teachers, or even family counselors. Reflecting on and discussing their stepfamily experience with stepsiblings and others may assist in perceptions of shared stepfamily identity. Leake (2007) argued that perhaps the most

important relationship for facilitating a sense of family belonging with stepfamilies is the stepchild's relationship with their parents and/or stepparents. She found that "the strongest predictors of higher levels of family belonging for stepfamily adolescents were the adolescents' satisfaction with their parental and step-parental relationships" (p. 146). Stepfamily researchers must continue to address the role of the parent and stepparent in stepchildren's overall adjustment to the stepfamily situation.

In the main study, I have successfully identified the elements of a stepsibling emotion profile as well as a politeness strategy coding framework for stepsibling emotional communication. Both the profile and framework confirm and extend research on interpersonal emotional communication (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999) and stepfamily development (Baxter et al., 1999; Braithwaite, et al., 1998; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2006; Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 1993; 2004; Metts et al., 2009). The coding framework, in particular, has important theoretical implications for Politeness Theory and its usefulness in examining emotional messages. Thus, in the next section, I discuss the theoretical implications these findings have on our understanding of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

Theoretical Implications

Politeness theorists posit that all human beings have both positive (i.e., the need to be liked and included) and negative (i.e., the need for autonomy and freedom from imposition) face needs that are continually threatened when individuals engage in social interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goldsmith, 2008). In an effort to maintain one's own face and the face of their relational partner, individuals use politeness strategies

during interaction to minimize the potential threat to face a message may contain. Since an emotional expression could be considered a type of face-threatening act, examining stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during the expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion supplied a more comprehensive view of the stepsibling emotional climate. Therefore, my results, specifically the development of a politeness strategy coding framework also confirms and extends the tenets of Politeness Theory.

Both stepsiblings' expression of positive and negative emotion did constitute face-threatening acts (FTAs) and stepsiblings employed a number of politeness strategies during the expression of emotion within the relationship. These findings validate Politeness Theory's usefulness in the study of emotional communication within interpersonal relationships. The politeness strategy coding framework can also be a useful tool in subsequent stepsibling or even stepfamily emotional communication research, considering that the results of this study found no association between the use of politeness strategies and stepsiblings' perception of the stepsibling relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. The utility of the coding framework should be tested again in future stepsibling research and even in other stepfamily relationship contexts. As Leake (2007) argued, the parental and step-parental relationships with stepchildren tend to have the most influence on how stepchildren adjust and communicate within the stepfamily. My findings do show it is possible to categorize emotional expression as a face-threatening act; however, there is an important limitation to using Politeness Theory in the study of emotional communication. Politeness Theory only focuses on verbal communication, and nonverbal communication is altogether ignored (Goldsmith, 2008).

Emotions can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally, and often relational partners can assign more meaning to the nonverbal message (Adler & Proctor, 2006). Although there are some important theoretical implications from the results of the main study, there are also a number of practical implications I discuss in the next section.

Practical Implications

There are at least two practical implications for both researchers and practitioners working with emotion and/or stepfamily issues. The first practical implication focuses on the difference in the emotional trajectory of stepsibling relational development in comparison to other types of interpersonal relationships. For emotional communication researchers who are studying stepfamily relationships, the emotional profile of stepsiblings shows stepsiblings are experiencing and expressing emotion differently than in most interpersonal relationships. Considering this, emotional communication researchers can conceptualize emotional communication more accurately across a variety of relationship types. Increased dialogue and attention concerning stepsibling emotional communication processes will likely generate discussion among researchers, who may share their findings with new stepfamilies who are currently dealing with the addition of new stepsiblings. Family practitioners, who counsel stepchildren and stepfamilies dealing with new stepsiblings, may also find these results useful in that they would have a clearer picture of what emotional issues were most salient at that particular stage in stepsibling relationship.

The second practical implication for stepfamily researchers and practitioners is the knowledge that the stepsibling relationship is not hopeless. Despite the general negativity that some stepfamilies might experience when they first begin to form (Baxter

et al., 1999; Braithwaite, et al., 1998; Braithwaite et al., 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2006; Burrell, 1995; Coleman & Ganong, 1995; Ganong & Coleman, 1993; 2004; Metts et al., 2009) , especially between stepsiblings (Coleman & Ganong, 1993; Lamb, 2004a; Walsh, 1992), my results suggest that given time, a stepsibling relationship can essentially “grow out” of that negativity. Indeed, stepsiblings can begin to experience and express positive emotion in relation to their stepsibling as the relationship continues to develop. This, of course, needs to be facilitated through communication with concerned and involved parents and stepparents (Leake, 2007) as well as through reflection and communication with supporters outside of the stepfamily (i.e., family counselors) (Freisthler et al., 2003). Researchers and practitioners can ensure frustrated stepsiblings and stepfamily members that with patience and a willingness to communicate the emotional climate between stepsiblings can and will improve.

With future research, practitioners could benefit from a list of best practices when struggling with the emotional experiences and expressions encountered during the early stages of developing stepfamilies. For example, researchers could examine the nonverbal element of emotional expression and whether it related to perceptions of stepfamily satisfaction and shared stepfamily identity. In addition, researchers could include the parent and stepparent role as mediator between stepsiblings during emotional communication. It seems that the success and/or failure of the stepsibling relationship cannot be understood without understanding its role in the larger stepfamily system. Researchers and practitioners should gain interest in understanding the stepsibling relationship due to the powerful emotions stepchildren must manage. Understanding

effective emotional communication between stepsiblings may be prescriptive of effective stepfamily functioning.

Although I offer both theoretical and practical contributions, my results should be interpreted within the limitations of my research design. In the next section of this chapter, I address these limitations and directions for future researchers.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Researchers

A first limitation of the main study is the fact that only one stepsibling was surveyed. Including the other member of the stepsibling dyad reported on would provide a richer, more comprehensive profile for stepsibling emotions. Soliciting participation from the other member of the stepsibling dyad could also assist in establishing the accuracy of the politeness strategy coding framework, ensuring that there was discernable written expressions of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotions. Exploring both stepsibling viewpoints, however, could have garnered different perceptions of the same emotional experience and expression situation. With both stepsibling perspectives, I could discover the type of politeness strategy one stepsibling used and then ask the other stepsibling about their perceptions of the emotional expression directly. Of course, there is a risk involved when both stepsiblings are aware that the other is discussing their relationship to an outside source. Their responses may be influenced by a social desirability factor when completing the questionnaire in the company of their stepsibling (Leake, 2007). In addition, the stepsiblings may discuss the nature of the questionnaire and their answers once they have completed their participation. This could cause emotional distress for the individuals and increased conflict between stepsiblings.

I asked participants in the main study to report on only one stepsibling even if they had multiple stepsiblings within their stepfamily. Allowing participants to report on all of their stepsiblings could also provide a more comprehensive profile of the nature of stepfamily emotion. Future researchers should consider incorporating multiple stepsibling viewpoints. Perhaps, first, concentrating on the stepsibling dyad and then adding additional stepsibling viewpoints depending on the size of the participating stepfamily. In addition, with the incorporation of multiple stepsibling viewpoints, actual observation of stepsibling of emotional expression would provide further insight into the emotional complexity of the stepsibling relationship.

The second limitation of the main study is the sample size. Despite recruitment efforts with both in-person and online questionnaires, a rather large number of participants, who were directed to fill out a questionnaire online, did not complete the questionnaire in its entirety, leaving only 187 participants to be included in the study out of the 250 initial participants. It is important to use a sample size sufficiently large enough to give the statistical tests conducted within the study adequate statistical power (Green & Salkind, 2005). A larger sample size was likely necessary for the statistical analysis of RQ 7a, and RQ 7b, which used a Welch's ANOVA to examine the relationship between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and stepsiblings' perception of the quality of their relationship and for RQ 8a and RQ 8b, which used chi-square contingency tables to consider a relationships between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and their perception of the entire stepfamily.

I plan to conduct future research replicating the current research design in an attempt to conduct an accurate analysis for research questions RQ 7-RQ 8b. The results

of this study for RQ 7a, RQ 7b, RQ 8a, and RQ 8b contradict what little information researchers have about the emotional nature of the stepsibling relationships; therefore, it is imperative that the research design be carried out again with a larger sample. This would allow the researcher to conclude that the lack of an association between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and their perceptions of the stepsibling relationship and the entire stepfamily is a reality of emotional communication with the stepsibling relationship rather than a function of poor research design.

A third limitation of the present study is my reliance on retrospective data from stepsibling. The majority of participants were college students reporting on stepsiblings relationships that formed during adolescence. For the first goal of developing a stepsibling emotional profile, I had to rely on self-report measures of the emotion scales. Similarly, for the second goal of assessing the stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies, I asked participants to describe a specific emotional expression during the first year living their stepsibling and a current specific emotional expression. A participant's recollection of their past emotional experience and expression may be less accurate and less detailed than their description of their current emotional experience and expression.

Future researchers should attempt to solicit participation from stepsiblings whose stepfamilies formed at different periods in their lives to see if the experience and expression of positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion differs depending on the age of the stepsibling(s) during the first year of living together under that same roof.

A final limitation of the present study involves participants' conceptualization of certain emotion terms. Due to dual loading issues with the CFA, the emotion terms envy, disappointment, and shame were dropped from the analysis. This is unfortunate,

especially for envy, considering Lamb (2004a; 2004b) found that stepsiblings reported experiencing envy in their relationship with a stepsibling. However, participants in the current study were unable to distinguish envy as either strong negative or weak negative causing envy to load for both constructs. One explanation for this could be individuals' inability to distinguish between envy and jealousy. While jealousy is experienced and expressed based on a potential *relational* threat, envy is a negative emotion that occurs when an individual senses an injustice that puts he or she at a disadvantage compared to another individual (Feather & Sherman, 2002). In addition to envy, pride is also difficult to conceptualize. Although some participants in the present study chose pride as the positive emotion they were reporting on, often times pride can be confused with the happiness. Future researchers in emotional communication need to consider the how certain emotion terms are conceptualized with the social culture they are studying.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a relatively large hole in the emotional communication research concerning the modern stepfamily. Despite the amount of research examining emotional communication within interpersonal relationships, little has been done that concentrates on the stepfamily context, let alone the stepsibling relationship specifically. In fact, the stepsibling relationship is largely absent from the larger body of general stepfamily research.

My results indicate stepsiblings' experience and expression of emotion was a function of the stage of their relationship. While most interpersonal relational partners tend to experience and express more positive and less negative emotion during the early stages of relational development (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Aune et al., 1994; Ekman

& Frisen, 1975; Metts & Planalp, 2002; Planalp, 1999), stepsiblings are dealing with the experience and expression of more negative emotion and less positive emotion, especially as their relationships begin. As such, the stepsibling relationship represents a rich context for understanding the complexities of emotional communication and its ability to characterize a relationship. In fact, stepfamily relationships in general offer an important emotional communication research context. The communicative challenges involved in the formation of a new stepfamily ensures that the communication within the stages of relational development for stepfamily members will look and sound different than the communication behaviors outlined in most interpersonal relationship development models. Perhaps the element of the stepsibling emotion profile of special interest to communication researchers is understanding the manner in which stepsiblings express positive, strong negative, and weak negative emotion, which was done by analyzing stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies during emotional expression.

I am not entirely convinced an association cannot be found between stepsiblings' use of politeness strategies and their perception of the quality of their relationship and their perception of the entire stepfamily. Politeness Theory is a useful theory for understanding stepsibling emotional communication and my findings reflect Goldsmith's (2008) call for proposing modifications to Politeness Theory, specifically to include an understanding of the nonverbal components accompanying the verbal message.

Through continued study, emotional communication scholars can develop a more comprehensive emotion profile for not only the stepsibling relationship but for the entire stepfamily system.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ Using the phrase “in their relationship” within RQs 2, 3, and 4, is meant to refer to stepsiblings’ report of emotions experienced and expressed toward or about their stepsibling during the first year of living together as well as currently.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Stepsibling Relationship Questionnaire

STEPSIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

SECTION 1: Please think about your relationship with one of your stepsiblings. Think back to a time in your relationship with this stepsibling when you expressed what you consider to be a **positive** emotion to him or her. I am going to ask you several questions about what happened in this situation:

1. In the space that follows, please list the **positive** emotion you believe you expressed to your stepsibling. For example, you may have expressed happiness, joy, or another **positive** emotion.

2. In the space that follows, please describe the situation you were in when you expressed the **positive** emotion to your stepsibling. For example, where were you, who else was there, etc. Please provide as much detail as possible.

Please turn to the next page →

3. In the space that follows, please write out what you said to your stepsibling. Do your best to write out the exact words you remember saying to your stepsibling. Please be as complete and detailed as possible in describing what you said to your stepsibling.

“

“

Please turn to the next page →

4. Please reflect on the incident in which you expressed the **positive** emotion to your stepsibling and answer the following questions concerning the **positive** emotional expression:

a. How long ago did this emotional expression occur? Identify the number of weeks/months: _____ weeks _____ months

b. How difficult was it for you to express that specific **positive** emotion to your stepsibling?

_____ Very difficult

_____ Difficult

_____ Not sure

_____ Somewhat difficult

_____ Not difficult at all

c. How difficult was it for you to express **positive** emotion of any kind to your stepsibling?

_____ Very difficult

_____ Difficult

_____ Not sure

_____ Somewhat difficult

_____ Not difficult at all

Please turn to the next page →

5. Think about your relationship with your stepsibling during the time of this **positive** emotional expression. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements describing your relationship with your stepsibling at this time? Use the following scale for your response:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	SD						SA
1. I could count on my stepsibling to be supportive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I could count on my stepsibling to be cooperative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My stepsibling and I had serious, personal talks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My stepsibling generally did not support me if I had a disagreement with my parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My stepsibling made me feel like a stranger in the stepfamily home.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Again, thinking about the time of this **positive** emotional expression to your stepsibling, which best describes your stepfamily? Please check one in the space provided.

- _____ 1. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there was one family.
- _____ 2. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there were two separate families.
- _____ 3. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there were two smaller families in one larger family.
- _____ 4. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like we were all separate individuals.

Please turn to the next page →

3. In the space that follows, please write out what you said to your stepsibling. Do your best to write out the exact words you remember saying to your stepsibling. Please be as complete and detailed as possible in describing what you said to your stepsibling.

“

“

Please turn to the next page →

4. Please reflect on the incident in which you expressed the **negative** emotion to your stepsibling and answer the following questions concerning the **negative** emotional expression:

a. How long ago did this emotional expression occur? Identify the number of weeks/months: _____ weeks _____ months

b. How difficult was it for you to express that specific **negative** emotion to your stepsibling?

_____ Very difficult

_____ Difficult

_____ Not sure

_____ Somewhat difficult

_____ Not difficult at all

c. How difficult it for you to express **negative** emotion of any kind to your stepsibling?

_____ Very difficult

_____ Difficult

_____ Not sure

_____ Somewhat difficult

_____ Not difficult at all

Please turn to the next page →

5. Think about your relationship with your stepsibling during the time of this **negative** emotional expression. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements describing your relationship with your stepsibling at this time? Use the following scale for your response:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

	SD						SA
1. I could count on my stepsibling to be supportive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I could count on my stepsibling to be cooperative.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My stepsibling and I had serious, personal talks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. My stepsibling generally did not support me if I had a disagreement with my parent.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. My stepsibling made me feel like a stranger in the stepfamily home.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. Again, thinking about the time of this **negative** emotional expression to your stepsibling, which best describes your stepfamily? Please check one in the space provided.

- _____ 1. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there was one family.
- _____ 2. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there were two separate families.
- _____ 3. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like there were two smaller families in
one larger family.
- _____ 4. Living in my stepfamily home, it felt like we were all separate individuals.

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *OFTEN YOU FELT* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Pity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Envy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Loneliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Liking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Hate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Disappointment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Forgiveness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Jealousy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Annoyance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *OFTEN YOU FEEL* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Pity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Envy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Loneliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Liking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Hate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Disappointment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Forgiveness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Jealousy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Annoyance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *STRONGLY YOU FELT* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Pity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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9. Loneliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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15. Jealousy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Annoyance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *STRONGLY YOU FEEL* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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11. Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Hate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *OFTEN YOU EXPRESSED* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Sadness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Pity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Envy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Loneliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Liking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Hate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Disappointment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. Forgiveness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Jealousy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Annoyance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 3: Directions: Please complete this scale about the same stepsibling you have been reporting on in the previous sections. Rate the following emotion terms by circling the number that best reflects how *OFTEN YOU EXPRESS* each emotion because of that stepsibling relationship *DURING THE FIRST YEAR THAT YOU LIVED UNDER THE SAME ROOF. BECAUSE OF MY STEPSIBLING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF LIVING TOGETHER, I FELT:*

	Never		Sometimes			Quite Often	
1. Anger	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Resentment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Happiness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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6. Fear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Pride	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Envy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Loneliness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Liking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Frustration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Hate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Disappointment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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17. Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Disgust	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Gratitude	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Guilt	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Embarrassment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Shame	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please turn to the next page →

SECTION 4: Please describe yourself and your current relationship with the stepsibling you reported on in this questionnaire by filling out the appropriate responses to the following questions.

1. Your Current Age: _____
2. Your Age at the Time of the Reported Positive Emotional Expression: _____
3. Your Age at the Time of the Reported Negative Emotional Expression: _____
4. Your Sex (please circle one): M F
5. Your Race/Ethnic Background (mark all that apply):
 White, Not of Hispanic Origin _____ Black, Not of Hispanic Origin _____
 Hispanic _____ Asian or Pacific Islander _____
 American Indian or Alaskan Native _____ Other (please specify): _____
6. The highest level of education you have completed (please check one):
 Some high school _____ High school diploma/GED _____
 Some college _____ Bachelors degree _____
 Masters degree _____ PhD/other advanced degree _____
7. Which stepsibling relationship (i.e., which stepfamily) did you report on (please check one)?
 Biological Mother/Stepfather Stepfamily _____
 Biological Father/Stepmother Stepfamily _____
8. How long have you been in this stepsibling relationship? (i.e., when did your stepfamily begin?) Please fill in:
 Date my stepfamily began: Month _____ Date _____ Year _____

Please turn to the next page →

9. If you currently live with your stepsibling, how often do you see or live with your stepsibling during the year (please check one):

During the Week Only_____ Every Weekend_____

Every Other Weekend_____ During the Summer Months_____

By Other Arrangement (please explain):_____

If you do not currently live with your stepsibling, how often DID you see or live with your stepsibling during the year (please check one):

During the Week_____ Every Weekend_____

Every Other Weekend_____ During the Summer Months_____

By Other Arrangement (please explain):_____

10. Your Stepsibling's Current Age: _____

11. Your Stepsibling's Age at the Time of the Reported Positive Emotional Expression: ____

12. Your Stepsibling's Age at the Time of the Reported Negative Emotional Expression: ____

13. Your Stepsibling's Sex (please circle one): M F

14. Your Stepsibling's Race/Ethnic Background (mark all that apply):

White, Not of Hispanic Origin _____ Black, Not of Hispanic Origin _____

Hispanic_____ Asian or Pacific Islander_____

American Indian or Alaskan Native_____ Other (please specify):_____

15. The highest level of education your stepsibling has completed (please check one):

Some high school_____ High school diploma/GED_____

Some college_____ Bachelors degree_____

Masters degree_____ PhD/other advanced degree_____

Thank you for your time and input.